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THE LORD OF  
LIFE AND DEATH

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J. D. JONES, M.A., D.D.

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# THE LORD OF LIFE AND DEATH

BY

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2-18-20



# THE LORD OF LIFE AND DEATH

## I

### THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

"Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, of the village of Mary and her sister Martha."—JOHN xi. 1.

I do not know whether it is legitimate to make comparisons between the miracles. Dr. Plummer says it is not. He says that to the philosophic believer in miracles all genuine miracles are alike. "When natural causes are inadequate, and a supernatural cause is admitted, all degrees of difficulty are excluded. One who has omnipotence to aid Him cleanses lepers and raises the dead as easily as He heals ordinary diseases. If any miracle is credible, raising a man who has been dead for four days is credible." No doubt that is all quite truly said. Every miracle brings us to omnipotence, and to omnipotence it must be just as easy to call Lazarus from the grave as to heal Peter's wife's mother who

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was sick of a fever. Philosophically Dr. Plummer is undoubtedly right.

But the ordinary person is not a philosopher, or at any rate he does not look at things philosophically. And, despite all that Dr. Plummer says, the ordinary everyday man will continue to think that this miracle of the raising of Lazarus transcends all other miracles which the Lord wrought. Indeed it is not alone the average, ordinary, non-philosophical person who gives this miracle a pre-eminence amongst the miracles. Scholars do it too. This is how Dr. Fairbairn describes it: "It is the greatest of Christ's miracles; to know this is to know all. There is none harder to believe; none that, believed, is so rich in meaning, so glowing in its assurance to faith and in its promise to hope. The truths embedded in it, and embalmed by it, are many and cardinal." I think its very place in John's Gospel seems to suggest that it was the climax and crown of Christ's miracles. At any rate, it brought the conflict between faith and unfaith to a head. This tremendous miracle, this startling and staggering sign was a sort of last appeal to the Jews. They had resisted and disregarded previous signs. Jesus had healed the impotent man at Bethesda, and the only result was that the resentment of the people was kindled against Him. He had given sight to the man that was born blind, and the only result was that they called Him a sinner and tried to kill Him. He makes one more appeal to this perverse

and obdurate people. He reveals His glory as the only begotten Son of God by raising Lazarus from the grave after he had been dead four days. He performed a deed so tremendous that it would seem that none could doubt or challenge His Divine power. But even that failed to bring them to faith. Unfaith won its final triumph, and the Jews made ready the cross. It failed as an appeal, but it left the Jews without excuse.

Now just because this miracle is so tremendous, it is the miracle that has been exposed to the most searching and rigorous and mordant criticism. Every objection, reasonable or unreasonable, that ingenuity could devise has been urged against it. And the reason for that is quite plain—the consequences of the truth of this story are so great. Spinoza is said to have declared that if he could be persuaded of the truth of the story of the raising of Lazarus, he would break up his system and become a Christian. That, as Dr. Plummer comments, is not a very logical position to take up, for the cardinal miracle in Christianity is not the resurrection of Lazarus, but the resurrection of Christ Himself. But still this miracle does exercise a mighty influence upon the hearts and intellects of men. For, once a man believes it, he cannot fail to be confronted with the question: "What manner of man is this, that even death and the grave obey Him?"

Every one is familiar with that poem of Browning which he entitles "An Epistle, containing the

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strange medical experience of Karshish the Arab physician." This Arab physician, travelling in Palestine, say some thirty years after our Lord's death, comes one night to Bethany, and at Bethany he meets with Lazarus, and hears his wondrous story. With the natural scepticism of the scientist he tries to account for the story by telling his friend it must be a case of mania induced by epilepsy, which epilepsy had been cured by some secret charm which Jesus possessed, and which it would profit other doctors to know. But the explanation which he thus gives does not satisfy even himself. There was something about Lazarus, a look about his face, a sense of eternity in his life that seemed to suggest that his amazing story might be true. Karshish was almost ashamed to tell his friend what Lazarus's story was. "He is stark mad," he says. But his story is this :

—That he was dead and then restored to life

By a Nazarene physician of his tribe :

—Sayeth, the same bade "Rise," and he did rise.

And then he goes on to tell his friend what Lazarus said about his healer. Of course he is quite mad, he says, but—

This man so cured regards the curer, then,  
As—God forgive me! who but God Himself,  
Creator and sustainer of the world.

He apologises to his friend for repeating so absurd a story, its implications were so tremendous, and

yet he cannot get it out of his mind, he cannot dismiss it as a mere fancy. For Lazarus was a man to whose soul heaven was opened while he was yet on earth. His feet were here on the earth, but his heart and brain moved in heaven. So, in spite of himself, he comes back again to Lazarus's version. It means that God was once upon the earth :

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?  
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—  
So, through the thunder comes a human voice,  
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!  
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!  
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,  
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,  
And thou must love me who have died for thee!"  
The madman saith He said so: it is strange.

That is the conclusion to which a man is driven if this story be true. There is no explanation but to say that this Person who was Lord both of death and the grave was the very God. And it is just because critics and sceptics fear and hate that conclusion that they have employed every device they know of to discredit this narrative.

I do not propose to discuss the various objections which have been urged against the historicity of this chapter. On the general subject of the credibility of the narrative I will content myself with just two general remarks. The first I have already hinted at. There can be no difficulty in accepting this story as simple and literal fact, for the man who believes that Jesus was the Son of God. We

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must remember that this is not the only story of our Lord's supremacy over death. The Synoptic Gospels give us two other illustrations of the exercise of the same power in the case of the daughter of Jairus and the widow's son at Nain. If we reject one of them we must reject them all, and probably that is what the critic who reduces Christ to the limits of a mortal man would do. But if you believe that Jesus was the Son of God, that He was declared to be such by His own resurrection from the dead, there can be no possible difficulty in the way of believing that He who triumphed over death so gloriously in His own case did verily possess the keys of death and of Hades.

The second general remark is this. The narrative, alike by what it says and by what it does not say, is itself warrant of its truth. A fictitious narrative usually betrays itself by its extravagance. Take one single point. If this story was simply a romantic invention, do you think the writer would have said nothing about the emotions and experiences of Lazarus? What a field that would have opened for the romancer! What a chance of making revelations as to the other world! But in this sober, restrained, matter-of-fact narrative no word of Lazarus's is recorded. Altogether we may accept Meyer's dictum as stating the case with exactitude and truth: "No narrative in the New Testament bears so completely the stamp of being the very opposite of a later invention." The very character

of the narrative is evidence that what we have here is not legend or myth, but sober historic truth.

There is, however, one difficulty connected with this story which deserves fuller consideration. It is really the only difficulty believing people need concern themselves about. That difficulty arises from the complete silence of the three first Gospels about this most tremendous of all miracles. Inevitably almost the question suggests itself, if this stupendous wonder actually took place, how is it Matthew, Mark, and Luke say nothing about it? Now, I do not pretend that this is not a difficulty, but I believe that it is a difficulty which to a large extent, if not entirely, disappears when we take all the circumstances into account.

First of all, let me say that the omission of the miracle by the Synoptics cannot be due to any difficulty they felt about believing that Jesus could raise a dead man to life, because they themselves give two illustrations of the same sort of wonder. That is to say, the silence of the Synoptics cannot be interpreted as casting doubt upon the possibility of the miracle. It is as well frankly to recognise that at the outset. But the omission of the story does seem a little bit startling nevertheless. Can we give some reasonable explanation of it? I think we can.

We must recognise that the Synoptic Gospels deal almost exclusively with the Galilean ministry. They do not profess to give a complete account of our Lord's life. Indeed, of recent years, the fragmen-

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tariness of the Synoptic account has come to be increasingly realised. There is a great gap, for example, between the close of the Galilean ministry and the last Passover. Luke does something to fill up the gap by mentioning certain incidents which occurred during our Lord's sojourn in Peræa. But, speaking broadly, the Synoptics leap straight from the Galilean ministry to the closing events of our Lord's life. And when it comes to the closing days, our Lord's own death and resurrection cast everything else into the shade. That is to say, the story of the death and resurrection of Lazarus did not come within the scope of their narrative. It was natural, however, for John to insert it because from first to last he lays special stress upon that Judæan ministry of our Lord, which the Synoptics had so largely ignored, and because also it helped to account for the hate and fury that ultimately led Christ to the cross.

This further consideration must be borne in mind: John's Gospel was the last to be written. It was written when the first generation of Christians had, to a large extent, passed away. Reasons for reticence and reserve which operated when the three first Gospels were written, had ceased to operate when John came to write. When the first three evangelists wrote their Gospels, Lazarus and the sisters may have been still alive, and the introduction of this story into their narratives might have involved them in persecution. It is an interesting



point, and it lends support to the suggestion that I am now making, that in Matthew and Mark there is no mention by name of any member of the Bethany family; while, though Luke does mention the name of the two sisters, he carefully abstains from naming the village in which they resided. Altogether it looks as if the first three evangelists intentionally exercised a certain caution in their references to the Bethany household. But when John came to write, the need for caution had passed. Perhaps the members of the family had died. In any case, the fall of Jerusalem had destroyed the power of the Jewish hierarchy. So John, without risk of involving the Bethany family in needless trouble, could tell the wonderful story of the mighty miracle which so inflamed the anger of the Jewish rulers and led directly to the cross.

Altogether, when we come to look closely at things, the silence of the Synoptics which at first seems so challenging admits of quite natural and adequate explanation. This miracle lay clean outside the cycle of the Galilean ministry, but it was absolutely necessary to John's account, concerned as he is mainly with the development of the hostility and hate of the rulers in Jerusalem. As Dr. Fairbairn puts it, "the speech of John was as inevitable as the silence of the Synoptics is explicable. Without this miracle John's history had wanted its key; with it, the Synoptics' history had wanted its unity."

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### CHRIST AND THE FAMILY

Turning now to the narrative itself, there is just one other general remark I would make, and it is suggested to me by a comment of Bishop Westcott's. He says: "It is of interest to notice that the first of the series of miracles which John records, and the last of the series, are both wrought in the circle of family life. John records for us only seven of our Lord's miracles. The first is the turning of water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. The last is this wondrous story of His mercy to the bereaved sisters at Bethany." In the first we see Jesus in the house of mirth; in the last we see Him in the house of mourning. In the first He is the giver of joy, in the last He is the consoler of sorrow. Take the two together and we have a beautiful representation of Jesus as the *perfect family friend*. There are some friends and acquaintances whose presence in our homes we are glad enough to have at times of merry-making. They add to the gaiety and hilarity of the company. But we are not keen at all upon having them when the blinds are drawn. They are useless and helpless then. But Jesus is as perfect a friend at the feast as at the fast, and at the fast as at the feast.

He was a welcome guest at the wedding feast of Cana in Galilee. His presence added to its joy. The rejoicings of the day would have been sadly marred if He had not been there. He deepened and en-

riched the gladness of that wedding feast. And Christ is still a good guest to have at the feast time. He is a good guest to have at the *wedding feast*. We call a certain functionary at our weddings "the best man." It is his business to see that the ceremony goes through without hitch or flaw; it is his business to see to it that the hilarity of the company is not allowed to flag. But the "best man" of all to have at a wedding is Jesus. He is the one who can sanctify and sweeten the joy of the feast. He is the one Who can ensure the happiness of the wedded life then begun. And it is not at wedding feasts alone that Christ is an enriching presence. Family happiness is always deepened and doubled by His presence. Our Lord is no kill-joy. He is no wet blanket on human happiness. He does not scowl on innocent human pleasures. He delights to share in them. And by sharing in them He prevents our sweet things from cloying upon us or becoming rancid and sour. He is a grand guest to have when things are sunny and bright with us. He is a perfect family friend at the time of the feast.

But he is also a perfect friend at the *time of the fast*. Indeed, at such a time, He is the only friend who can do anything to help or succour us. It is good to have Him when marriage-bells are pealing, it is almost better still to have Him when the passing-bell is tolling. He is grand in the house of mirth, but He is best in the house of mourning. By His presence He can double our joys; but by His

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presence He can also lighten our darkness and comfort our sorrows. In fact, at fast time, when the blinds are drawn, *He is the only Friend*. Men and women of our acquaintance can do something to add to the zest of life's *feasts*, but Jesus is the only friend who can really comfort us in life's *fasts*. I am not forgetting human sympathy and affection or belittling what they can do. It is good when, in the shadow of some great affliction the soul sits dumb, to feel the warm clasp of a loving hand. But, after all, at its very best, how little human sympathy can do! When I have written letters of sympathy to men and women who have suffered loss, I have felt again and again how pathetically helpless sympathy is at its best. "What can I say? What can I do?" so began a letter of sympathy which reached me not long ago from Australia. But Jesus can say and do things that make a world of difference. He can say things which flood the darkened home with light; He can do things which enable the stricken soul to sing songs of faith and trust and hope even in deep midnight.

He is the best Man in the house of mirth: He is the *best* and *only* Man in the house of grief. He comes, and, with His coming, somehow the sobs cease, and the tears are dried, and strength comes and the light breaks. He bindeth the broken in heart and healeth all their wounds. What a Friend He is for such a time as this! Indeed, the sorrows and losses of this time would be unbearable but for

Jesus. He comes and shares in our sorrows. In all our afflictions He is afflicted The sword pierces His heart when it pierces ours

But He does more than share our sorrow. He effectually comforts it. For to us, as to the sisters, He speaks great words about the resurrection and the life. He tells us of the Father's house, and the prepared place, and then He says: "Let not your heart be troubled." There are people who will tell you that they do not know how they could have got through their sorrows and griefs during these tragic years were it not for Him! But He has given them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. And happily for us men and women, He is as quick to come to the house of grief as He is to come to the house of mirth. That is not so with a great many of our earthly friends. They are ready enough to come to the feast, but they are slow to come to the fast. They like the wedding, but they shun the funeral.

But Jesus responds to the call of distress as swiftly as He does to the call of mirth. It was this assurance that He would respond to the call of distress, it was their feeling that He was the only Friend who could really help them, that made the sisters at once turn to Jesus when Lazarus fell ill with his mortal sickness. They at once thought of Him. They know He could succour them. So to Him, in that other Bethany, which was twenty miles

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away, they send the message, "He whom Thou lovest is sick." In form it was not an appeal, it was just a statement of fact. They knew that was all that was necessary. They knew there was no need to beg or urge Him to come. "It sufficed that He knew: for He who loved would never desert." And their confidence was not misplaced. It was enough for Christ to know. How gloriously He responded to their appeal, how completely He changed their sorrow into joy, the sequel of this story will reveal to us.

And this lesson we may well take to ourselves in our times of grief and sorrow, let us send for the *best Man*. Many people have been doing it in these recent years. They did not trouble much about Jesus in their days of prosperity, but they have been sending for Him of late. And happily for us, even though we forget Him in our days of sunshine, He does not neglect us when in our days of calamity we call upon Him. He is never deaf to the cry of grief. He always hurries with swift help and succour. Before we cry He will answer, and while we are yet speaking He will hear.

## II

### THE BETHANY HOUSEHOLD

"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus."

JOHN xi. 1-5.

BISHOP WESTCOTT says that in the story which this chapter has to tell there are four scenes to be distinguished. The first sixteen verses give us what he calls the Prelude to the miracle; the next sixteen verses give us the scene at Bethany; the succeeding eleven verses give us the account of the miracle itself, and the final paragraph tells us about the issues of the miracle and its effect upon the people, upon the rulers, and upon Jesus Himself. In the verses the Bishop calls "the Prelude" we shall discover numerous things of deep and absorbing interest.

"Now a certain man was sick," says the evangelist, "Lazarus of Bethany of the village of Mary and her sister Martha." There are certain small points which the wording of this verse seems to suggest, and which it may be worth while to notice just in passing. I should gather, from the order in which they are named, that Mary and Martha were better known than their brother, and that of the two sisters the name of Mary was the more familiar. I

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should argue that Lazarus was not so well known as his sisters from the fact that he is described as their brother. We always describe the lesser known by his relation to the better known, and not *vice versa*. And John describes Lazarus as belonging to the village of Mary and Martha. Some commentators think that Lazarus was the youngest member of the family. That may quite well be, but that is not why he is described by his relationship to his sisters. He is described by that relationship because they were known by name to Christian folk and he was not.

Let me remind you again that this fourth Gospel was the last to be written. It was written for the use of Christian people who had already had for several years the first three Gospels in their possession. It was written for people who were quite familiar with the history so far as the Synoptics gave it to them. That accounts for John's omissions and insertions. Now in these Synoptic Gospels Lazarus is not mentioned, for I dismiss as not being worthy of consideration the suggestion that he is the Lazarus in the parable of Dives and Lazarus; as I dismiss also the suggestion that he is to be identified with the rich young man who made the great refusal, an identification which has absolutely nothing to warrant it. But while Lazarus is not named in the first three Gospels, his sisters are. Luke tells that familiar story about bustling about preparing supper and Mary sitting at the Lord's feet. So that all Christian people were familiar



with their names. Throughout the Christian Church the Bethany sisters were known. So that it was the most natural thing in the world for John in introducing Lazarus to describe him as the brother of Mary and Martha.

Then, again, I should argue that of the two sisters Mary was the better known, or at least she held the first place in the affections of the Christian people. That was partly due to the fact that our Lord had placed the seal of His approval upon her. "Mary," He said, "hath chosen the good part." But it was also due to the fact that the story about the breaking of the alabaster cruse of ointment over the head of Christ was a well-known story in the Church of Christ. John refers to the story in the second verse. "It was that Mary," he says, "who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair." Everybody knew that beautiful story. The Synoptic Gospels had made it known. (The anointing had not actually taken place at this point in our Saviour's life. It was Mary's tribute of adoring gratitude to her Lord for His goodness to Martha and to her for raising Lazarus back to life.) Our Lord's word had come true. Wherever the Gospel was preached that deed which Mary did was spoken of for a memorial of her. And though Mark only says "a certain woman" and does not mention Mary by name, everybody knew that it was Mary who had wrought that beautiful work. Well, John identifies her in that way. "The Mary," he says, "whose

brother Lazarus was, was that Mary the story of whose anointing the Lord's head and feet you all know."

Well, that incident had given Mary, shall I say, a "popularity," which Martha did not possess. Throughout the Christian Church there was no name better known than that of Mary. So John mentions her in front of Martha, though Martha was the elder of the two sisters. From the standpoint of *being known* this is the order in which this little family stood—Mary, Martha, Lazarus. Just in passing let me also say that there is absolutely no ground for identifying Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene, out of whom there went seven devils, or with the woman who was a sinner who anointed the feet of Jesus away in Galilee. These identifications which have no shred of support in any ascertained fact, only show, Godet says, how easy it is for a learned and intelligent man to prove anything that he *wishes* to prove.

Here then we have the little household, the two sisters and the one brother (the parents no doubt having passed away). And between the two sisters and the brother there was the tenderest love and affection. Martha (with her bustling way) was sometimes a little impatient with Mary, but her little fits of impatience were only like scuds of cloud that dull the sun for a moment, but which cannot stop its shining. I do not think I should be wrong in saying (I think that this chapter furnishes proof of it),

that sisters and brother were all in all to one another. But the happiness of the home at Bethany was enhanced and perfected by the fact that, in addition to the love they bore one another, they enjoyed the love of the Lord. That is how Lazarus is described in the message the sisters sent to Christ. "He *whom thou lovest* is sick." And I cast my eye ahead, verse 5, and I find it was not Lazarus alone whom our Lord loved. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." All the inmates of the home had a share in the Lord's love. And that tempts me to say, in passing, here we get the secret of *a perfectly happy home*. I am not going to say a single word in the way of disparagement or belittlement of the sacred gift of human love. It is that which makes our homes the dearest places in all the world to us. Married love, parental love, filial love, they are holy and beautiful things, and wherever they are to be found, the happiness of the home is secured.

Without love, people may adorn their dwelling-places as they please, but they remain houses, not homes; but when love is present a cottage becomes a home dearer and more precious to those who dwell within than all the palaces of kings. But, to perfect the happiness of the home, one other love is necessary, and that is the love of Christ. It deepens and enriches all other love, and it avails when other loves get wounded and torn. The measure of our human love is the measure of our exposure to pain.

The deeper and tenderer our love for wife or child or parent, the deeper our grief when sickness assails them, or death snatches them from our side. But the love of Christ is a love from which nothing can ever sever us. There is no possibility of pain in this love; nothing but the sure promise of joy and blessing and enrichment. "For neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And it is an infinitely healing love when our other loves lie torn and bleeding. So, I repeat, the perfectly happy home is that home in which, in addition to our love for one another, we are all blessed with the love of Christ. That was the case at Bethany. They had made a friend of Jesus. They welcomed Him to their home. They delighted to have Him for their Guest. And He repaid their warm affection with His own deep and strong and sacred love. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." And let us remember our Lord is equally ready to enter our homes as He was to enter this home at Bethany, to give us His love as He was to give it to the two sisters and the brother, and I repeat the happiness of the home is secure when the inmates of it all love one another, and in turn are all of them loved of the Lord.

I think, too, it may be worth while to dwell for a moment upon the individualising love of Christ. He loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. They differed from one another, but Christ loved them all

alike. What a catholic and comprehensive love the love of Christ is! Martha and Mary will, I suppose, always be held up as types respectively of the *active and the meditative temperaments*. The picture we have of Martha in the Gospels is that of an active, bustling, good-hearted housekeeper, anxious even to the point of fussiness for the comfort of her Guest, and inclined to be irritable with Mary because, instead of helping her with the supper, she preferred to sit at the Lord's feet and hear His words.

Mary, on the other hand, was a quiet, contemplative spirit, whose chief delight it was to sit in silent rapture, drinking in those words which were spirit and which were life. The two sisters differed widely in disposition and character and temper; they were far as the poles asunder. Now most of us are so partial and one-sided that we find it quite impossible to admire equally such totally contrasted characters. At any rate, we find it impossible to *like* them equally. If we are of Martha's active temperament, we do not care much for Mary, with her quiet ways; if, on the other hand, we are of Mary's mystical spirit, Martha's fussiness frets and wearies us. We like people who are spiritually akin to us; we are repelled by those who are spiritually alien to us. But there was nothing partial or one-sided about Jesus. He was the Universal Man. And so we find Him appreciating, understanding, taking to His heart men and women of the most diverse qualities of soul.

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"Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." The busy housekeeper and the quiet mystic had an equal share in His affection.

And there is a veritable Gospel in all this. It means that our Lord's love is a catholic and comprehensive love. It means that His love is not limited to a type or a class, but that men and women of the most diverse characters and temperaments may share in it. Had we read that He loved Martha and not Mary, or Mary and not Martha, that would have smitten us to the heart with fear, for it would mean that Jesus had His favourites. But to read that He loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus helps us to believe that whosoever cometh may share in the love of the Lord. Yes, Jesus has room in His heart for the most diverse of men. He has room in it for the ardent and impulsive Peter, and for the quiet, mystical John; He has room in it for Paul, the passionate preacher of faith, and for James the preacher of works. He has room in it for Francis of Assisi and for Dominic, his rival; for Thomas à Kempis brooding in his cloister, and for Martin Luther storming his way through a thousand fights. He has room in it for George Herbert, the devout Anglican, and for John Bunyan the Puritan; for John Henry Newman the Romanist, and for Charles Spurgeon the Protestant of Protestants. He has room in His love for you and for me. The saints are of every rank and class and type and temper, but they all find a place in that love whose length and breadth

and height and depth passes all our knowledge. Such, then, was the home in Bethany, rich in human love, richest of all in the enjoyment of the love of Christ.

Into that home trouble came, for Lazarus fell sick. And the sickness was a sore one, and the sisters saw themselves threatened with the loss of their brother and protector. In their trouble they at once thought of Jesus: they had heard of what He had done for others. They had heard how He had given sight to the blind, and cleansing to the leper, and healing to the sick. He had done this to people whom He had never seen, and about whom He knew nothing but their need. That in itself had been enough to move Him to pity, and to call forth His healing power. They were quite sure if He only knew about Lazarus He would hurry to his help. For Lazarus was not simply a sufferer in need of His succour, he was His *friend*. So to Jesus in the other Bethany beyond Jordan they sent a messenger with this announcement: "He whom Thou lovest is sick." In form it is not an appeal. It is simply a statement of fact. Godet thinks that they refrained from urging Jesus to hasten to Bethany because they knew the perils awaiting Him in Judæa, and knew the journey could be performed only at risk of His life. I prefer to think that their trust in Christ was so complete that they felt all that was needed was to let Him know. They did not try to dictate to Him what He should do, they just let Him know and then left

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it to Him to do what He deemed best. It is rare and beautiful trust. I am not sure that it is not an example of what prayer ought to be. It is right to tell God our needs, our burdens, our desires, our cares. But, having told them, we ought to have such absolute confidence in Him as to leave Him to do what He thinks best.

But though in form the sisters' message is just a statement, and though it does argue a beautiful trust in Christ, as a matter of fact the statement embodied the tenderest of appeals. Look at the exact wording of it. They did not say, "Lord, our brother Lazarus is sick." They said, "Lord, behold *he whom Thou lovest* is sick." There was an appeal in that, the most moving and touching of appeals, the appeal to the Lord's love. "He whom Thou lovest," and the word "love" there stands for the love of personal attachment, there is the throb and warmth of human affection in the word. The sickness of Lazarus could not fail to be a matter of concern to Jesus, for *Jesus loved him*. If Lazarus had been a stranger to Jesus there might have been need to press and urge Him to come. But seeing that *He loved him* there was no need to press or urge. He would do what He could, and what He did would be the best. As Augustine remarks in his comment upon this sentence, "It was enough that He knew; He could not love Lazarus and desert him." And we can still appeal to the Lord's love. For, although we no longer have the joy of receiving Christ in bodily presence



into our homes, yet, just as surely as Lazarus, we may share in His love. "The Son of God loved me and gave Himself up for me." Every one of us can say that. And just because we are all of us the *beloved of Christ*, there is no need to press and urge Him to come to our help, when trouble visits us and sorrow assails. All we need to do is to tell Him. "He whom Thou lovest is sick." "He whom Thou lovest is in peril." It is enough that He knows, for He cannot love and desert us.

When the message reached Jesus in Bethany, perhaps in the evening of the day on which the messenger set out, Jesus said, in the hearing of the messenger and of His disciples, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." "This sickness is not unto death," said Jesus. That does not mean that Jesus did not expect it to terminate fatally. That does not mean that He expected Lazarus to recover in the ordinary course of nature. What He means is that *death* was not to be the end of this sickness. The end of it was not death, but resurrection and life. Death was not the terminus; death was simply a station on the way; the terminus was recovered life. The real end of the miracle was the glory of God. People would think more of God because of what happened to Lazarus. They would see God's power and majesty and love. And not only the glory of God, but the glory of the Son as well. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the

glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." Christ was to be glorified as the Son of God by the revelation of His Divine power in the raising of Lazarus. What could people say of one who had such power but that He was very God?

But our Lord is probably thinking of more than the immediate revelation of His power in the act of raising Lazarus from the dead. He was finally glorified through His cross and resurrection. It was in the cross and the empty grave that He was declared to be the Son of God with power; it was in them His measureless love was revealed, it was through them He was to win His throne. And the raising of Lazarus was a link in the chain of circumstances that led up to the cross. It was the event which brought the enmity of the Jews to its climax. Jesus saw that the sickness and death of Lazarus would hasten the coming of the cross, but the cross to Him was not defeat, but glory. That was to be the end of Lazarus's sickness, the glory of God and of His Son. You will notice how He speaks of God's glory and His own in the same breath, as if they were one and the same thing. And they were one and the same thing. The glory of God is the glory of the Son, and the glory of the Son is the glory of God. When Jesus said, "Father, glorify Thy name," the voice replied, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." How was God about to glorify it again? By the willing sacrifice of His Son. Father and Son are one, and the glory of the one is

the glory of the other. The glorification of the Son in the raising of Lazarus was also the glory of the Father. And that was the end of the miracle, not death but glory. The sisters at that very moment were plunged in grief because their brother was already dead (for in all probability he died on the very day the messenger left); but Jesus away in the other Bethany was calm and undisturbed because He saw beyond death to glory. The sisters stayed at *death*, a station on the way, and they wept. Jesus saw to the terminus, *glory*, and He was full of a solemn joy.

And do you not think that that is the mistake we commit still? Do you not think that our sorrow and grief over our ills and troubles and losses are due to this, that we stop at some station by the way and do not realise what the end of it all is to be? It is the *end* that justifies and explains the process. God's dealings will often seem perplexing and baffling if we think only of the immediate happenings. We must let our minds travel to the end. We are called upon to suffer sometimes. And we grow hard and bitter because we do not see beyond the suffering. But the suffering is only a station on the way. The end of it all is a chastened character. In these tragic years we have suffered the loss of many a dear one. The stark and terrible fact of death has been the only thing we could see. And it has well-nigh broken our hearts. But death is only a station on the way. The end is not death, but glory. We see

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loss and ruin all about us just now, and we are in despair. But the present loss and ruin are but a station on the way. The end is not ruin, but a recreated world. We are sad because we do not see. But He who can see the end from the beginning cherishes high and immortal hope for us and the world. If we too had His vision and His faith we too should have His cheerful courage, and of every sickness we should believe that its end was not death but the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

### III

## THE DELAYS OF LOVE

"When therefore He heard that he was sick, He abode at that time two days in the place where He was. Then after this He saith to the disciples, Let us go into Judæa again."—JOHN xi. 6, 7.

I AM inclined to agree with Dr. Horton that this is the most unexpected and amazing *therefore* in all literature. To realise how unexpected and amazing it is, you must always read it in conjunction with the preceding verse. For this word *therefore* connects it with what goes before. It is in what goes before that you must seek the reason for the action recorded in this verse. Well, what goes before? This: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When *therefore* He heard that he was sick, He abode at that time two days in the place where He was"! Did you ever know a *therefore* so strange as that? Because He loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus, therefore He stopped away from them when they most needed His help. Because He loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus, *therefore* when they sent an urgent message begging him to hurry to them, for two days He took no

notice of their request. Because He loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus, *therefore* He did nothing to avert the threatening trouble and actually left them to bear it alone.

It is such an amazing *therefore* that our first inclination is to think it must be a mistake. If it had read, "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus, and yet He abode where He was two days," it would have lessened our difficulty somewhat. If it had read, "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus, but for two days was unable to go to their help," we should have felt no difficulty at all. But this *therefore* is absolutely staggering. It clean takes our breath away. Supposing we did not know the Gospel and were asked to supply the next sentence to this statement, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus," what should we have written? Why, something like this: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When therefore He heard that he was sick He set off that instant to succour him." Or, "When therefore He heard that he was sick He said to His disciples at that hour 'Let us go into Judæa again.'" That is what we should have written. That would have been the natural thing for Christ to do, for He was always quick to help and swift to bless. Before men called He answered, and while they were yet speaking He heard. But what the narrative says is this: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus: when therefore He heard that he was sick, He

abode at that time two days in the place where He was." It is a very disconcerting *therefore*, this! Because Jesus loved these people, therefore when they were in trouble He stayed away from them! Because He loved them, He left them to themselves for two days, and only came to them when the blow had fallen and all that seemed possible was to mingle His tears with theirs.

Now, that you may not think that I am unduly stressing this *therefore*, or reading too much into it, let me quote to you Bishop Westcott's comment on it. "The delay and the return were alike consequences of the same divine affection and of the same divine knowledge." Well, we have no difficulty at all about the *return*. That is exactly how we should have expected Christ's love to reveal itself. The staggering thing is to find the *delay* represented also as the consequence of Christ's love and knowledge. "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When therefore He had heard that he was sick, He abode at that time two days in the place where He was."

### LOVE IN DELAY AND DISAPPOINTMENT

But, staggering and amazing though this *therefore* is, there is a perfect wealth of comfort and good hope in it. For what is its message but this; that there may be love in our delays and disappointments and crushing sorrows? "Thy love," says one of our hymns, "has many a lighted path no mortal eye can

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trace." So it has. It takes strange roads at times. It takes us through trouble and loss, through griefs manifold and long delays. We are tempted often to say, "An enemy has done this." No, it is love's road! I wonder whether I can give an illustration or two which will help us to realise the truth which I am trying to expound.

Take the story of Joseph. What trials and tribulations he passed through. When he was sold into slavery into Egypt, when he found himself in prison on a false and foul accusation, it seemed as if God had clean forgotten and forsaken him. But slavery and imprisonment were love's strange path to the second place in the kingdom. Because God loved Joseph, therefore He allowed him to be sold into slavery and to be cast into prison.

Take the story of the journeyings of the Israelites. What disappointments they endured! When they left Egypt they fully expected that a march of a few days or at the most weeks would land them safely in Canaan. Instead of that, they wandered for forty years in the wilderness, suffering hunger and thirst, and confronting dangers on every hand. It really seemed as if God had forgotten them, and the people often wished themselves back in Egypt. And yet that dreary, disappointing, grave-lined, wilderness way was love's way. It welded the Israelites into a nation. It fitted them for independent life. It made them strong enough to overcome the obstacles that confronted them in Canaan. Now



God loved Israel *therefore* He led them not by the way which was near, but by the long wilderness road.

Take the case of St. Paul and his thorn. I do not know exactly what the thorn was—it was some excruciating pain, possibly some sort of ophthalmia which often seriously interfered with the Apostle's work. It seemed a messenger of Satan sent to buffet him, and Paul prayed again and again that he might be delivered from it. But the thorn was really love's way. It brought to Paul new and surprising revelations of God's grace, so that he learned to rejoice in his very infirmities. God loved Paul, *therefore* He allowed this thorn in the flesh to torture him.

Or, think of St. Paul's imprisonment. He quite reckoned on bonds and imprisonment awaiting him in Jerusalem; but somehow I do not think he reckoned on a long captivity and a prison in Rome. That went sorely against the grain with him. It upset his plans, it interfered with his work. But the assault in Jerusalem, the long captivity in Cæsarea, the tragic voyage, the Roman imprisonment—they were all love's way. "I would have you know," he writes to some of his friends, "that the things which happened unto me fell out rather unto the progress of the Gospel." God loved Paul, *therefore* He allowed him to be seized, and shipwrecked, and chained to soldier guards at Rome.

These will perhaps serve to illustrate the principle. The Lord allows delay and disappointment and sorrow to visit us, not *although* He loves us, but

*because* He loves us. Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. "When *therefore* He heard that he was sick, He abode at that time two days in the place where he was."

I think it is only right to point out that we are not to understand that our Lord stayed these two days in order to allow Lazarus's sickness to accomplish its work, so that, instead of healing the sick, He might have the opportunity of raising the dead, and so show greater power and win the greater glory for Himself. Such a supposition, as Bishop Westcott says, is alien equally from the spirit and from the letter of the narrative. As a matter of fact (as you can see for yourselves if you will follow out the time-marks given in the narrative), Lazarus died on the very day the message was sent. He was probably dead when the news of his sickness reached Jesus, and our Lord knew it. He did not delay His going to win greater glory for Himself, but "*because* He loved the family, He went at the exact moment when His visit would be most fruitful, and not just when He was invited." But there was love in the delay. At the moment I dare say the sisters were full of rather hard thoughts about Him. When at last He came, both the sisters met Him with exactly the same reproach.

But when they had received Lazarus back again to life I think they would be glad of the delay. It gave them Revelations of Christ they would not otherwise have had. Revelations not simply of His

power, but of His deep sympathy and love. Looking back, the sisters would say this was exactly the right conjunction to use: "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When *therefore* He heard that he was sick, He abode at that time two days in the place where He was." And we may take the comfort of this *therefore* to our own hearts when delays and disappointments try us, and sorrows well-nigh overwhelm us. The very things that make us think sometimes that God has forgotten us may be the proofs of His love. Because He loves us, *therefore* He weakens our strength in the way. Because He loves us, *therefore* He lets all His waves and billows go over us. Because He loves us, *therefore* when we cry to Him to save those we loved dearer than life, He makes no sign but lets them die. Because the Father loves us, *therefore* He chastens us. This *therefore*, if we but took it to our hearts, contains in it a great and glorious Gospel. I do not say that we always recognise it. I do not say that we can see the love in our sorrows and troubles and disappointments. We have to take it on trust. But it is a tremendous help to believe it is there, even if we cannot see, to believe that back of every trouble, trial, grief, and loss there is the *therefore* of God's holy and measureless love.

### THE RETURN

Our Lord delayed to go to Bethany because He loved the Bethany family and wished to serve them

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in the best and highest way. And yet I can quite imagine, as Godet suggests, that to Jesus the *Man*, the *Friend*, the two days He spent after hearing the news passed very slowly. His impulse was to go to them at the instant, to waste not a moment's time. It was only because He knew that the right hour had not struck that He delayed at all. But, at the end of the two days, He received that signal from His Father by which He always regulated His proceedings. Do not ask me what the signal was. It may have been the exigencies of the work in which He was engaged. It may have been some inward constraint. I cannot tell. But Jesus referred every act of His to the Father's will. He always did the things which pleased Him. And if, on the day the message reached Him, He felt it was His duty to stop, two days later He was equally clearly convinced that it was His duty to go. So to the disciples on the third day He said "Let us go into Judæa again!"

The commentators all call attention to the fact that Jesus does not say "Let us go to Bethany," which would have seemed the natural thing to say, but "let us go into Judæa again." And they all see, in the use of the word *Judæa*, a reference to the perils that threatened Jesus in Judæa. "The thought," says Westcott, "is of the hostile land of unbelief in contrast with Peræa." Judæa was a name of ill omen for Christ. He had met there with nothing but opposition and rejection and cruel hate. He had

just retired from there because the leaders were plotting His death. In Peræa, on the contrary, everything had been happy, genial, pleasant. The kindly welcome of the people cheered Christ's heart. "And many believed on Him there." Peræa was a sort of Beulah land in which, before His cruel cross, our Lord was permitted to sojourn for a while to the refreshing of His soul. But now the call came to go back to Judæa. And though it meant facing scorn, and hatred, and cruelty, and certain death, He went. "Then, after this" (*i.e.* after the two days), "He saith to the disciples, Let us go into Judæa again."

Here is our Lord *facing danger at the call of Duty*. He saw God's finger pointing to Judæa, and He went back to face the murmurings and threatenings of the rulers and their cruel murderous plots. He went back to face once again the uplifted stones. This simple, unhesitating devotion to the will of God was eminently characteristic of Jesus. "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem," He had said one day. And knowing what Jerusalem meant for a prophet, I read this about Him, "He stedfastly set His face to go up to Jerusalem." The thought of danger never daunted Him. He followed His Father's lead without hesitation or demur. He went back to face all Jerusalem's hate when duty called Him that way. Duty's way is often a dangerous way, but brave souls never shrink from treading it. Listen to this from the Acts of the Apostles: "Hav-

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ing stoned Paul" (at Lystra) "they drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead." And then I read this, "And Paul returned again to Lystra." He went back to the stones. He went back to the place where they had tried to kill him. It is almost an exact parallel to our Lord's action. "Let us go into Judæa again." And all down the centuries Christian men, at God's call, have been ready to face danger and death. They killed John Williams in Erromanga, but the missionaries went thither again. They murdered them in the New Hebrides, but Christ's heralds went thither again. They butchered Chalmers and Tompkins in New Guinea, but pioneers of the London Missionary Society went thither again. And all these men are in the train of Him who the third day said to His disciples, "Let us go into Judæa again." But duty, let us remember, is worth the danger. They killed Jesus in Jerusalem. But that death was His triumph, and the cross on which they slew Him has become His throne. So duty done in spite of danger leads still to blessedness, and inward peace, and eternal glory. It is still true—

"The toppling crags of Duty scaled  
Are close upon the shining table-lands  
To which our God Himself is moon and sun."

But here is more than danger faced in duty's cause: here is *love taking risks*. "The delay and the return," to quote Westcott's comment once again,

“were alike consequences of the same divine affection.” “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When therefore He heard that he was sick, He abode at that time two days in the place where He was.” “Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. . . . Then after this He saith to the disciples Let us go into Judæa again.” Because He loved them He delayed two days. And, because He loved them, after two days’ delay He went.

I mentioned in the previous chapter the suggestion of Godet that the sisters’ message to Jesus took the form of a statement, not of an appeal, because they knew of the perils that menaced Jesus in Judæa, and they did not want Him to incur any danger. Now it was natural for these sisters, in their love for Jesus, to be thoughtful of His safety. But it was equally natural that our Lord’s love for Lazarus should impel Him to take the risk. For the most notable characteristic of love, the outstanding mark of love, is this, it is absolutely *self-regardless*. “Love seeketh not its own.” Love never stays to think of its own comfort, or convenience, or safety. It will run any risk and make any sacrifice for the loved one. Think of a mother’s love, for example. Watch her, for instance, with a sick child. There are risks of infection in connection with the child’s sickness. But do these risks keep a mother away? There she is ministering at the bedside, taking all the risks for love. That is the very nature of love; it is not self-

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regarding, it is sacrificial. It will dare anything for the loved one's sake. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. And no risks in the world could prevent Him from hurrying to their help in their great sorrow and bereavement. "After this He said to His disciples, Let us go into Judæa again." And this was not the greatest risk that Christ's love impelled Him to take. Think of the risk He took for you and me. While He was yet in His glory with the Father *He loved us*. He loved us when we were in our lost estate. He loved us while we were strangers and aliens from God. And because of His love for us He left His home in heaven for this world of ours. There were risks—of misunderstanding, of rejection, of hatred, of death. He knew them before He came. But His love for us was so deep and strong that He took them all. Love impelled Him to risk everything, even life itself, in order to save us. "The Son of God loved me," says Paul, "and gave Himself up for me." The Son of God loved and took the risk of the Cross.

"O 'twas love, 'twas wondrous love,  
The love of Christ for me,  
It brought my Saviour from above,  
To die on Calvary."

His uttermost love took the uttermost risk.

I am moved before I pass on from this point to ask you a question. We profess to love Christ; has our love ever made us risk anything for Him? I



get concerned sometimes about the fact that there is so little that is adventurous and risky about our religion. We are cautious and prudential people. Our religion never gets us into trouble. We keep so discreetly silent about our religion that we run no risk even of the scorn and laughter of the world. It gives us an easy time, no doubt, but our religion is not particularly effective. There is one maxim of Nietzsche's which the Church of Christ must learn if she is to regain power. It is this: "Live dangerously." The Church must be willing to take risks. Christian people must be willing to take risks. When we are ready to risk ease and comfort and popularity because of our love for Christ, things will begin to move. Is our love of that sacrificial kind? Christ risked everything for us; are we risking anything for Him?

And then, finally, here is *love speeding with help and succour*. "Let us go into Judæa again." It had been hard for Him to wait the two days. He could see the sisters in their sorrow, and He longed to comfort them. As soon as ever the hour struck He was on His way. The sisters during these two days thought that He had forgotten them. They had never, as a matter of fact, been out of His mind. And the fourth day brought them proof of it. The disciples were one night alone on the Sea of Galilee, and a fierce gale arose and threatened to engulf them. And in their peril they thought hardly of their absent Master. They blamed Him for sending them

away alone. They blamed Him for being regardless of their peril. Regardless? He had been watching them all the time, and in the fourth watch of the night He came unto them, walking upon the sea. At the fitting time their Lord came to their help. It was so too with these sisters. On the fourth day love came with help and healing. "Let us go into Judæa again."

That is ever love's way. It delays sometimes. But it never forgets. "Can a mother forget her sucking child? Yes, she may forget, yet will I not forget thee. I have graven thy name on the palms of My hands." There is always a fourth day or fourth watch when love reveals itself. Is the storm pressing heavily upon you just now, and are you tempted to think your Master has forgotten? Wait for the fourth watch and He will come and turn the storm into a calm. Is it that trying time when the Lord delays and makes no sign? Have faith and patience; the fourth day will come and it will bring Jesus with it, and when He comes He will give a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

## IV

### THE TWELVE-HOUR DAY

"The disciples say unto Him, Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone Thee, and goest Thou hither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day?"—  
JOHN xi. 7, 8.

LET me begin by connecting up these verses with what has preceded. When the message about Lazarus's sickness reached Jesus in Bethany He did not at once hurry off to the help and succour of the sisters. Jesus was wont to regulate all His movements by reference to the Divine will, and at the moment it was the Divine will that He should continue the work He was carrying on at Bethany beyond Jordan. So for two days after receiving the message He abode in the place where He was. But at the end of the two days He received the sign that it was now time for Him to journey to the other Bethany. So on the early morning of the third day He said to His disciples, "Let us go into Judæa again."

I have often wondered what the disciples thought of our Lord's delay. For they had heard the announcement of Lazarus's sickness, and they knew

the Lord's love for the family. I have often wondered what they thought of their Master's apparent indifference. Sometimes I have thought they may have put the delay down to the fact that their Master somehow knew that the sickness would not prove fatal. But, on the whole, I am inclined to think that they put it down to common sense and prudence. They said that of course Jesus would never dream of going, because it was not safe to go. There are cases where men see their fellows in need of help, and yet they are absolutely unable to give it. Cases of that sort occurred daily in the dreadful war now ended. Wounded men lay out in the open. The men in the trenches could hear their cries and could do nothing to help, for to venture where they lay was to incur certain death. It was death for Jesus to venture into Judæa, so, much as He would like to have answered the call from Bethany, it was simply impossible for Him to go.

I am on the whole pretty sure that is how the disciples explained their Lord's delay, and they heartily approved of the prudence which they thought He was showing. I gather as much as this from the amazed protest they made when, on the morning of the third day, Jesus said, "Let us go into Judæa again." "Rabbi," they said, "the Jews were but now seeking to stone Thee, and goest Thou thither again?" "This is sheer madness," they said in effect. "This is senseless rushing into danger and death. Only the other day the Jews had stones in

their hands to fling at You. They will pick the stones up again if You venture back." It was a natural protest, perhaps, and I am not disposed to be hard on these disciples for making it. For there was love in it. They loved their Master so well that they wanted to keep Him. They did not want Him to run needless risks. We can sympathise with them. Love could not help hoping in these tragic days now over that son or brother was in some safe place. Love could not help wishing that for a lad who had suffered wounds there might be no need to go back to France again. Yes, surely, there is love in it, devoted and tender love, and we can forgive much to love. Nevertheless, love in this case was seeking to divert Jesus from the path of duty. Love was seeking to dissuade Him from obeying His Father's call. Love was putting a stumbling-block in the Master's way. And the worst stumbling-blocks of all are those which love lays in the way. The opposition of evil men one expects and one can face; but the opposition of love is a more terrible hindrance far. And our Lord had to face it on more than one occasion. It was the *Devil* who tempted Him in the wilderness to abandon the way of the cross, and to take an easier and quicker way to the world's throne by worshipping him. That temptation was hard enough to conquer. But the temptation was sorer far when Simon Peter reiterated the Devil's plea, and when Christ talked of the cross, said, "God forbid; this shall never be unto Thee." It was a case

of *love* putting a stumbling-block in the Lord's way. And this, too, was a case of love laying a stumbling-block. The disciples would have prevented Jesus from going back to Judæa if they could. They protested against the very idea of it. Judæa meant danger and the possibility of a violent death. "The Jews were but now seeking to stone Thee, and goest Thou thither again?"

But not even love availed to divert Christ from His purpose. He saw His Father's hand beckoning Him back again to Judæa, and the objections of His disciples were powerless to prevent Him. In answer to their amazed protests against the idea of going to Judæa again He said, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walk in the day he stumbleth not because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night he stumbleth, because the light is not in him."

I think we all have a fair idea of the essential meaning of that saying of our Lord's. It may have been morning when He uttered it. The day was before them, and within the limits of daylight they could make the journey to the other Bethany in safety. But it was not of that journey that Christ was mainly thinking, though it may have suggested the language. He was thinking of His life-work, of His appointed task. There was a certain definite time for that, and while the time lasted He was safe. This is how Godet paraphrases it: "I may fearlessly go wherever duty calls Me. I know that My

twelve hours' work is not yet over. The duration of My earthly life is meted out and secured to Me by a higher will. So long as it lasts, I may walk without fear on the road prescribed by my mission. The danger of stumbling will not begin until, by basely eluding a foreseen danger, we seek to prolong the time of our life and add, so to speak, a thirteenth hour to the twelve which are lawfully ours. From that time we cannot fail to stumble, for the sun of the Divine Will will no longer shine upon us; an hour of life not given to us by God is an hour without duty and without a mission."

As applied to Christ's own particular case at the moment it meant this, "The Jews will not be able to shorten by a single moment the time granted Me for accomplishing My work on earth; real danger, that of walking without God, can only reach Me if, as you propose, I should try to prolong my life by refusing to go where duty calls Me." Now this is a great word in itself, and it throws a wonderful light upon the character of Christ.\* Will you let me speak first of all about the light it throws upon the character of Christ?

### CHRIST'S UNSWERVING PURPOSE

First of all, what a light it sheds upon our Lord's *steadfastness of purpose!* The protests and expostulations of the disciples never for a moment deflected Him from His resolve. How calm and unruffled the answer is! There is no suggestion of agi-

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tation about it. It reveals the absolutely steadfast and resolute mind. And that is eminently characteristic of Christ. There was no fluctuation of mind or variation of purpose to be discovered in His career. You remember what the Apostle James says about the dubious, hesitating, uncertain person, the person of mutable mind? "He that doubteth is like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed." He can be tossed hither and thither by every gust of opinion, by every breath of emotion.

But neither the opposition of His foes nor the persuasion of His friends could divert Christ from His course by a hair's-breadth. He sped to His goal as directly as an arrow to its mark. Jesus knew His business in the world. He knew what He was here for. He knew the mission on which He had been despatched, and to the accomplishment of that mission He gave Himself with unswerving devotion. He was steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. No one can read the Gospels carefully without noticing this intensity of purpose. It reveals itself in certain words of His, as, for example, this: "I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!" It reveals itself in His acts, as, for example, this: "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." It is the same unswerving steadfastness we see in this incident. The work of the Lord at this juncture called Him back to Judæa,



and back to Judæa He went. Neither menaces nor persuasions could deflect Him from the path along which God's will bade Him walk.

### CHRIST'S FEARLESSNESS

Then, again, what a light it throws upon our Lord's fearlessness and courage! He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah in an incident like this. The disciples had the fear of the priests and the rulers before their eyes, but Jesus held on His way in no wise affrighted by the adversaries. I wonder whether we have put as much emphasis upon this aspect of our Lord's character as we ought to have done. We have so emphasised His gentleness as to run the risk of making Him appear effeminate. The very pictures of Christ which are familiar amongst us give prominence to what I may call the feminine qualities in Him. I often feel that the long-haired, pensive Person who is presented to us in pictures does very scant justice to the Jesus of the Gospels. For the Jesus I find here is an intense, forceful, fearless man. Courage is quite as characteristic of Him as gentleness. He is Lion as well as Lamb. In days like ours, with their call for the heroic, we must preach the heroic Christ. It is the Fearless Christ Who will cast His spell upon our men who have faced danger on land and sea. And it is that courageous Christ we see here. "Let us go into Judæa again," He said. There was danger

and death waiting for Him there—but duty called, and He never flinched.

### THE UNFLURRIED CHRIST

And what a glimpse we get here of the *unflurried Christ*! “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” He said to these nervous and panic-stricken disciples of His. They thought of hostile and furious priests and rulers, and they were afraid. But He knew that priests and rulers were powerless against Him until His hour had struck. His times were not in the hands of His foes, but in the hands of His Father. He knew He would have the twelve hours appointed Him of His Father. So He was not alarmed or disturbed at the thought of what the rulers might do.

I spoke just now of the *intensity* of Christ’s life. But there was another quality of it just as noticeable, and that was its *serenity*. Intensity and serenity seem at first sight to be almost contradictions. They seem to exclude one another. If a man is intense he is not serene. And if he is serene he is not intense. The serene man tends to become placid and slow. The intense man is often fretful and impatient. But both qualities co-existed in Christ, and contributed to the perfect balance of His character. He was at once intense and serene, concentrated and yet calm, urgent and yet quiet. You get both aspects of Christ’s character in two words which I would like to put side by side. When about

to heal the man who was born blind He said to His disciples, "We must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." There you get the urgency and intensity of Christ's life. "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" He said, when about to set out to raise Lazarus from the dead. There you get the calm and serenity of Christ's life.

We have invented a new word during these dreadful war-times, or perhaps I ought to say we have put an old word to new uses. The word I have in mind is the word "rattled." Statesmen told us more than once that we must not allow ourselves to be "rattled." And by that I suppose they meant that we were not to allow ourselves to be hustled into foolish action by nerves and panic. They told us if we kept cool and steady we should win. Well, people (if you will allow me to use the term) were never able to "rattle" Jesus. They tried once to "rattle" Him by telling Him that Herod Antipas was trying to kill Him. But the information never ruffled His calm. "Go and tell that fox," He said, "Behold I cast out devils and perform cures to-day and to-morrow and the third day I am perfected." To-day, to-morrow, the third day—Jesus refused to be hustled. In face of Herod's menaces He went quietly on with His work.

And the disciples on this occasion were really trying to do the same thing. They were trying to "rattle" Jesus. They reminded Him of the stones.

But He refused to be disturbed. "Are there not twelve hours," He said, "in the day?" Nothing that the priests and rulers could do could hasten the hour of His end. He had His twelve hours and they could not abridge them. "Without haste, without rest"—that describes Christ's life. He knew the night was coming, and there was no time to waste. But He knew He had His twelve hours, and He refused to be hustled. To be intense without being flurried—that is the ideal. When we are intense we are so apt to become excited and feverish. We need continually to offer the prayer—

"Breathe through the pulses of desire  
Thy coolness and Thy balm."

But in Christ intensity and serenity blended in a character of absolutely perfect poise.

And now let me look at the great words themselves for the permanent truth they contain: "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" It suggests a number of truths which we should do well to lay to heart.

#### LIFE'S TWELVE HOURS

"Twelve hours"—there is a *limit to our day*. Life is a measurable and compassable thing. The day ends and the night swiftly falls! Some people act as if their earthly life was an endless thing, and as if they had infinite time. They are prodigal with time. They let it pass by unimproved. They are careless with it as if they had an infinite and ex-

haustless stock of it. But there are just twelve hours. Life at best is a very brief and limited thing. Twelve hours, and that means that there is not an hour to waste. The thought of the brevity of life ought to lend us intensity. The "hours" of life are not of the same length for everybody. Some people's "day" is comparatively long, like the days in midsummer. And some people's day is very short, like the days of mid-December. But for the longest lived of us it passes swiftly and the night soon comes! Twelve hours! How urgent life ought to be for us! "Work while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work."

*Twelve hours*, and within the limits of these hours *we are safe*. No evil power can rob us of a single one of them. No foe can abridge our hours to ten or eleven. In every man's life there are the twelve appointed hours. Strip this of all allegorical dress, and it means this—every man has his appointed time, and that time is appointed by God, and it is not in the power of any person to alter or abridge it. Which, again, means this—that every man's life is a plan of God; that He orders our path during our working day, and He ordains the time of our lying down. There is nothing haphazard or accidental about the day of our death. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.

Amongst our soldiers at the front there has prevailed a kind of fatalism. They used to say of a man who had fallen that he "had his number up."

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So long as a man hadn't "his number up" he would go through battle unscathed. But if "his number was up" he would fall, though the day were a quiet day. I have called it fatalism because there is not much thought of God in it. But introduce the thought of God, and is it not profoundly true? God has His twelve hours for us, and till twelve has struck nothing can hurt or harm us. It is true, as the old saying puts it: "A man is immortal till his work be done." Every man has his twelve hours, sufficient time to accomplish his work here below, and no one can abbreviate these hours by a single tick. We talk about the premature deaths of our soldier lads, and yet every one of them had his twelve appointed hours. Not one of them fell before his appointed earthly task was finished. When we know all, we shall see that there was nothing casual or accidental even about their end. They did their work and they had their twelve hours. If Death found them, it was because their appointed task was complete.

And here is the secret of serenity. There are twelve hours in our day, and so long as those twelve hours last we cannot stumble. We can go on our way quietly to-day and to-morrow until the third day comes, which brings with it our perfection. I read a letter yesterday from one of our soldier boys, sent to a mother grieving over the news of the death of her only son. "God," said this boy, "has some meaning in the death of the young, though we can-

not see it." And surely he is right. It is the one thought that brings us any sort of comfort. They passed from us because the twelve hours God had assigned them on earth were up, and it was time to go home again. And I repeat that it is in this faith, amid the uncertainties and sudden sorrows of life, we find quietness and peace. Our times are in the Father's hands. To every one He gives his twelve hours, enough time to finish his appointed task. These twelve hours no one can abridge or shorten. There are really no such things as "premature deaths," amongst those, at any rate, who love the Lord. There are twelve hours in every man's day.

"Twelve hours in the day." *Can a man add a thirteenth to them?* Christ seems almost to imply that he can. But if he tries to add a thirteenth, it will not be daylight with him, it will be night. "And if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth because the light is not in him." That is what the disciples were trying to do, though perhaps they did not know it: they were trying to persuade Jesus to add a thirteenth hour to His day. They were trying to persuade Him to prolong His life by shirking His duty. His Father was calling Him back to Judæa again. Of course, it meant danger; in the long-run it meant more—it meant death. But, then, that was the Father's will for Him. It was through death He was to accomplish His work and come to His Throne. His disciples tried to persuade Him to save His life by refusing Duty's call, by re-

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jecting His Father's Will. Suppose He had taken their advice, He might have got a thirteenth hour, He might have prolonged His life. But it would have been "night" with Him. He would have lost the sunshine of His Father's face. He would have stumbled His way into oblivion and contempt.

Of course, it was inconceivable that Jesus should do that. It approaches irreverence even to suggest it of Him. But *men* are often tempted to purchase that thirteenth hour. Godet illustrates by the case of a Christian man who should purchase pardon in the days of persecution by denying his faith, or a doctor who on the outbreak of some plague should run away from the infected district to save his own skin. You remember the old story of Cranmer, who was induced on promise of life to sign a recantation of his Protestant faith. That was an attempt to purchase a thirteenth hour. But Cranmer discovered that the thirteenth hour was just black night unlit by any glimmer of the sunshine of God's face, so he recanted his recantation and accepted duty and death. I dare say some of our captured soldier lads had the same sort of alternative thrust upon them. They could have had life, and something more than life, if they had only agreed to reveal to their captors what they knew of the preparations and plans of the British. It was just an attempt to induce them to purchase a thirteenth hour. But it is never worth while. For the thirteenth hour is always "night," and in the night men stumble



to their destruction. The thirteenth hour, if men snatch at it, is an hour without the sense of duty and without the security of mission, and unlighted by the presence of God. It is night, and men go stumbling through it to the outer darkness. Let us be content with our twelve hours. Let us be content with just that much of life that we can enjoy conscientiously with obedience to our Father. The man who is content with his twelve hours walks in the light, and when he comes to the end he finds himself, not in the outer darkness, but in the land of which it is said, "There is no night there."

## V

### PROVIDENTIAL ABSENCES

"These things spake He: and after this He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."—JOHN xi. 11-15.

OUR Lord, in the two preceding verses, had really given His reasons why, in spite of danger, He was resolved to go into Judæa again. It was the voice of duty that called Him. While obeying the voice of duty it would be day with Him and He would not stumble. But if He sought to add an additional hour to His life's day by shirking a dangerous duty, then the additional hour, even if He got it, would be *night*, and He would go groping and stumbling along His way uncheered by the light of the countenance of God. Life is not worth having, said Jesus in effect, if it can only be gained by a sacrifice of duty. If the Voice of God calls, then "forward in God's Name," even though it be forward into danger and death. It is better to die in the sunshine of the smile of God than to live and lose it. "These things spake He." They gave the clue to His action. They revealed the principles on which He was acting. Believing all that, and being persuaded that

the Voice of God was calling Him to Judæa, there was only one course of action open to Jesus. So it is not in the least surprising to find Him, having spoken thus, reiterating His intention of going to Bethany. "After this He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." "*But I go*"—there you get our Lord's steadfast and settled purpose. There was no wavering of mind. The persuasions of His disciples did not shake Him. He clutched at no thirteenth hour. He was content with twelve hours and the light. Now, these words in which He reiterated His intention of going to Judæa, while apparently quite simple and straightforward, are, when you begin to look at them, full of Divine suggestion.

Take, to begin with, the terms in which Jesus talks of Lazarus: "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep." "Our friend"; of course it emphasises the affection in which Lazarus was held, not only by Jesus, but by His disciples as well. "He whom Thou lovest is sick": so ran the message. "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus": so runs the Evangelist's statement. And here Jesus acknowledges the affection and declares it to be mutual—"Our friend!" He associates the disciples with Himself. It is not "My friend," it is "our friend." Godet comments on this that the phrase "appealed to the affection of the disciples." Just as the sisters had appealed to His affection when they said, "He whom Thou lovest is sick," so now He

appeals to the disciples' affection by saying, "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep." Their affection might possibly help them to overcome their fears and make them brave to take the risks of the journey. For love will dare all things. And that, apparently, is all that Godet sees in it. But there is much more than that. "Our friend Lazarus," said Jesus. And where was Lazarus when He said it? In the grave! And in what condition was Lazarus when He said it? Dead! Now, here is the significance of this phrase: Lazarus was dead, but he was still "our friend." Lazarus was in the grave, but he was still "our friend." / Neither death nor the grave had been able to interrupt the friendship that bound them together. / Now, there is involved in the fact that Christ could speak of the Lazarus whose body was in the grave as "our friend," two truths of almost measureless comfort for mortal men and women.

The first is this, that the men and women who have passed through the gate of death, though they have gone beyond reach of our sight, *are still alive*. Christ says as much in plain words in His conversation with Martha, a little farther on in the chapter. But it is involved in the fact that here He calls Lazarus "our friend." It takes two living people to make a friendship. Friendship is a reciprocal relation. It is a relation in which love answers love. You cannot have friendship where the love is all on one side. And you cannot have friendship in any

real sense between a man who is alive and capable of loving, and another who is dead and incapable of loving. You may have affection for the memory of a dead friend, but it is absurd to talk of friendship with the dead.

Now, the fact that Jesus still talks of Lazarus as "our friend," that He regards the friendship as still existing, implies that Lazarus was still alive. It is exactly the same argument He employs when He says that the fact that God is called the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob implies that the patriarchs are still alive. For God cannot stand in the relation of God to dead men. The fact that God is God to anybody, that He stands in the relation of God, implies that He gets from such person or persons the homage and worship and faith due to a God. But it is only living people who can render such homage and worship; therefore if God still stands in the relation of God to these patriarchs, who long since left the earth, it follows that they must be still alive. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." And the same is true about this relation of friendship. It can only exist between living people. And the fact that our Lord speaks of Lazarus, though he had been in the grave three days, as "our friend," shows that Lazarus was still alive.

And the second truth the use of this phrase teaches us is this, not only that Lazarus was still alive, but that *friendship* survived death. That is

one of the things about the Beyond concerning which people most long to be assured, not only that their dear ones are alive, but that the old affection continues, that on the other side they are still *son, brother, husband, wife*. It is not a pale, shadowy existence they desire: they want to know that love still subsists. For what comfort would there be to bleeding and aching hearts in the thought that their lost lived on if they ceased to know them and care for them? Immortal life in itself would not be much of a boon unless there were also recognition and love. But a phrase like this dispels all doubt upon that point. Let all sorrowing folk mark this little phrase as one of the most comforting in the whole of the Bible. It brings them the very assurance they need. Lazarus, on the other side of the grave, was still Christ's friend. Death had made no change in his love. The old affection still persisted, and we may be happy about our own loved and lost on that score. That inscription on the grave of the Kingsleys is not sentiment, or poetry, or emotion simply, but blessed truth: "We loved, we love, *we shall love*." "Death cannot separate us from the Love of God," says St. Paul. It cannot separate us from any love. On the other side of death and the grave, husbands and wives, sons and daughters, they love us still. We need not vex our souls with doubts as to whether they will recognise us or whether they care. All the assurance we need on that point is wrapped up in this little phrase,

"Our friend Lazarus." What they were, they are still, the only difference being that the love is purer and holier. You can venture to say, "*my husband, my wife, my boy, my girl.*" Death cannot and does not destroy love.

"Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep," said Jesus. "Is fallen asleep!" What a beautiful expression! I do not, however, want you to think that it was Christ's *invention*. It is a common metaphor for death, not only in Rabbinical writings, but even in classical literature as well. The analogy between sleep and death is so obvious, indeed, that it was bound to strike an imaginative mind. "Sleep," as someone said, "is a daily rehearsal of death." Nevertheless, Christ has given an entirely new significance to the phrase. To the heathen world death was a sleep, but it was a sleep from which there was no waking. To Jesus it was the sleep that means renewal and restoration, and which wakes to a better morning. It was our Lord's favourite word for the end. He disliked that word *death*. It was so chill and hopeless. And the dissolution of soul and body was to Him not the end, but a new beginning. It meant ampler and larger life. So *sleep* was His word. For sleep is the great repairer and restorer. "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth"; "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep." And by His Own glorious resurrection He has made us quite sure that that is all death means. It is a case of closing the eyes on one scene to open them on a

fairer. It is a case of a night which swiftly ends in a happier morning.

"He giveth to His beloved in sleep," says one of the Psalmists. There are gifts God bestows upon us in our unconscious hours. Sleep knits the ravelled sleeve of care. It gives us relief from our anxieties and sorrows. It repairs our wasted energies. It restores our exhausted minds and bodies. Every night God gives great gifts to us in sleep. But He confers His greatest gifts of all in that final sleep. Vision, knowledge, a body of glory, final and complete emancipation from sin, eternal life—He gives all these things to His beloved in sleep.

"Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep; but I go, that *I may awake Him* out of sleep." The calm authority of it! The sense of power that breathes through a sentence like that! Jesus knew that Lazarus was dead, but He knew too that he was not beyond the reach of His voice. Tennyson asks the question about Lazarus, you remember: "Where wast thou, brother, those four days?" Well, I do not know that anybody can answer that question, with dogmatic certainty. But this much we know—a sentence like this makes it abundantly clear—he was alive and within call of Christ. He was still within the authority of Christ. "I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." The grave is not a prison of which Death holds the key. "I have the keys of Death and of Hades." All our lost and dear are in



the keeping and within the authority of Christ, and with that we may be happily content.

“The disciples therefore said unto Him, Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will recover.” Now, we are not to interpret this reply of the disciples as sheer stupidity. They were prone, I know, to take Christ literally, and to treat His poetry as prose. But there was considerable excuse for this misunderstanding of theirs. For you remember Christ’s remark on hearing of Lazarus’s illness: “This sickness is not unto death.” They understood that to mean that Christ knew that the illness would not have a fatal termination. And so when, two days later, they heard Him talk about Lazarus “sleeping,” they naturally concluded all danger was past. For a good, natural, healthy sleep often marks the crisis of an illness, and the definite turn towards the recovery of strength. It was literalism, if you like, but it was not deliberate misunderstanding that made the disciples say this. It seemed to them that, if Lazarus had been able to sleep, it was another strong reason why they should not make this dangerous journey into Judæa. For, “if he is fallen asleep, he will recover.” The Greek word is “he shall be saved.” The primary meaning, of course, is: “he shall be saved from impending and menacing death.” Bishop Westcott, however, sees more in it than that, and makes this comment: “It is important to notice how the word ‘save’ reaches through the whole of man’s nature to every part of it.” We

cannot draw the line between what we are tempted to call the higher and the lower. I am not at all sure that any such idea was in the minds of the disciples who uttered these words, but it is as well to remember that the word "saved" is a wealthy word, and embraces body as well as soul. It is not as disembodied spirits we shall live in the Beyond, but clothed upon with our house which is from Heaven.

Seeing how the disciples had failed to grasp His meaning, our Lord dropped all metaphor and said unto them plainly: "Lazarus is dead." "Dead" was their word, not His, but He used it to make Himself clearly understood. And then, having plainly declared the fact of His friend's death (an evidence, it is worth noticing as we pass, of His supernatural knowledge), He added a very strange word: "And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe." Bishop Westcott says that the words "to the intent that ye may believe" are brought into the very closest connection with "for your sakes," so as to explain this strange saying. Christ is glad, not for the death of Lazarus, but for the circumstances and issues of the death. He would willingly have spared the sisters the sorrow into which his death had plunged them. He would gladly have spared them their sense of desolation and loss during those terrible four days of mourning. And yet for the disciples' sake He was glad He was not there. Blessings were to come

to them—a quickening and mighty strengthening of faith—which could never have come had not Lazarus died.

You will notice how Jesus takes it for granted that death would have been impossible if He had been present. “If Thou hadst been here,” said Martha, “my brother had not died.” And that was true. Death and sickness could not exist in the presence of Christ. He was the Resurrection and the Life, and sickness and death had always to flee from before Him. If Christ had been at Bethany, Lazarus would not have died at all. But Jesus was glad that He was not there, for the sake of these disciples of His, to the end that they might believe.

But did they not believe already, you ask? Yes, certainly, *in a sense*. The fact that they had left all and followed Christ shows that they believed on Him in a sense. And in a very real sense too. I do not want in any way to belittle or to disparage the faith of these disciples. But *faith*, in its very nature, is not stationary, but progressive. It continually grows and strengthens. “He who is a Christian, is no Christian,” said Luther. He who thinks he is the complete and finished article is not a Christian at all. The Christian realises how far short he is of what he ought to be. He never feels he has attained, he is always pressing forward. And it is like that with faith. One stage of *faith* attained becomes the starting-point to another and higher stage. And when faith has reached a higher stage,

the faith at the lower level scarcely seems faith at all. Well, these disciples had faith of a sort, a real faith so far as it went, but an imperfect faith at this stage. They believed Jesus was the Messiah. But at this stage they certainly did not think of Him as Divine. He was not the Eternal Son of God to them. What happened at the grave of Lazarus helped them to this higher faith. They believed in Jesus in a new way and a deeper way when they saw He had power even over death itself. And the time was coming when they would need all the faith they could command. For their faith in their Lord was put to a severe and indeed a terrible test quite soon after this, when they saw Him killed and buried.

I have often asked myself what held the disciples together during those days when Jesus lay in the grave. For when Jesus was crucified His Cause seemed to have suffered final collapse and defeat. And when a cause has been defeated, its adherents usually disperse and scatter. What held the disciples together? Not simply love. I believe back of their minds there was the sort of feeling that Jesus' grave could not be the end, for had they not seen Him show Himself Master over death itself? There was some sort of faith in the disciples which not even the cross and the grave could shatter; I believe it was a faith born at the grave of Lazarus. They "believed" in a new sense from that day onward. And because it gave rise to a faith which

not even the cross could kill, Christ was glad that He was not there to save Lazarus from death. His absence brought a greater blessing than His presence.

And with this little sentence as my warrant, let me preach the truth, that there are such things as *providential absences*. We think the presence of Christ is the surest proof of His love and favour. Not always! He may deliberately absent Himself because a greater blessing will come through His absence than could have come through His presence. "I was glad for your sakes that I was not there!" At first sight it looks a strange and almost heartless sort of gladness. Jesus glad because He was not at hand to succour the sisters in their need! But the gladness was not that He was not there to help them, but that through His absence He could confer a richer blessing than He could by His presence. This is one of the hard truths we have still to learn, that the Lord is gracious, and is thinking upon us for our good, even in His *denials* and *silences* and *absences*. For still, when trouble and sorrow and loss menace us, we cry to our Lord to deliver us from it. What parent did not in these recent years cry to God to save his child? And sometimes, He seems to pay no heed. He does not come with swift help and succour. He does not avert the threatened stroke. He lets it fall, and we are tempted to think He has forgotten and forsaken us. And all the time He Who knows everything, Who

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sees what the result of the trouble is going to be, may be saying: "I am glad for your sakes I was not there." Glad, because sorrow borne and endured is much more enriching than sorrow averted. If I may take the classic case of Paul's thorn once again by way of illustration, Paul prayed thrice that it might be taken away. And the Lord seemed to pay no heed. It was an absence of the Lord which Paul, and I dare say all his friends, deplored. But, as a matter of simple fact, the endurance of the thorn brought Paul blessings he could never otherwise have enjoyed. It brought him new and wonderful experiences of the grace and power of God. I dare say his friends, when they thought of his affliction, said: "What a pity!" Jesus said: "I am glad." The absence was not forgetfulness. It was a sign of God's providential care.

"I was glad for your sakes that I was not there, to *the intent ye may believe.*" The sisters and the disciples had a more vivid trust in Christ because the trouble fell, than they possibly could have had if the trouble had been averted. And that is often the result of Christ's absences and silences still. They bring us to faith. They cast us upon God. They make the eternal world real and vivid to us. They reveal to us the power of our Lord to comfort and to save. And though our Lord never willingly afflicts or grieves the children of men, He is glad if the result of trouble and loss is that faith and trust become ours. I do not want to utter pious

platitudes. I want to keep near to the facts of life and experience. But is it not a simple matter of experience that loss and trouble again and again make men feel the need of God and teach them to believe? That was the testimony which a soldier boy gave to me, and that after a terrible experience in the trenches, when he himself was wounded and narrowly escaped with his life—faith had become a more real thing to him than ever. Well, in later days will he not be glad even of the terrible experience which gave him that vivid faith? I remember a woman in my Lincoln congregation. She was a woman of great physical strength. She was a Christian in a sense, and very active in administering to other people in their need. But one day she herself was smitten with paralysis. She found herself as helpless as a child. She found it terribly hard to bear, and she prayed constantly and earnestly that strength might come back. But it did not. But something else came, an experience of Jesus such as she had never had before. She knew His comfort and grace as perhaps she never would have known otherwise. In process of time she was ready to say with the Psalmist: "It was good for me that I was afflicted."

The absences of Christ do that for men, they lead them to believe. We do not see all this while we are in the midst of the trouble. We fret at what looks like the absence of the Lord. But He Who sees the end from the beginning, Who knows that

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the effect will be to make us rich in faith, says: "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe."

So let us not repine at the absences of our Lord. There is a picture in one of the foreign galleries entitled "Cloudland." It hangs at the end of a long gallery, and at first sight it looks like a boding, menacing, threatening sky. But as you come near, the clouds resolve themselves into an innumerable company of little angel faces. Which is a parable. The dark cloud is God's angel. The seeming absences may be a blessing. "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe."



## VI

### THOMAS

"Thomas therefore, who is called Didymus, said unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with Him."—JOHN xi. 16.

LET me resume my exposition by taking up the thread of the narrative once again. Jesus had astonished His disciples by saying, on the third day after He had received the news of Lazarus's illness: "Let us go into Judæa again." To the disciples the proposal seemed sheer madness, for it was only yesterday, so to speak, the Jews had taken up stones to stone Christ, and it was indeed to escape from their murderous fury that He had journeyed to Peræa. To go back again was deliberately to invite trouble. It was, indeed, to rush into certain death. All this was involved in the amazed and indignant protest of the disciples. But the protest did not move Christ. He told them He had twelve hours in His day, that duty was calling Him to Judæa, and that if His obedience to duty brought Him to His death, it was better so to die doing God's Will than to enjoy a thirteenth hour uncheered by the sunshine of His Presence.

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Then He said: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." The disciples saw in that another reason for staying where they were. They could have understood Christ risking things for His friend so long as the illness was critical. But the fact that he slept showed that the crisis was over and the turn had been taken. "If he is fallen asleep," they said, "he will recover"; and therefore, they meant their Lord to understand, there was no need to journey into Judæa again. Thereupon our Lord, laying all figure and metaphor aside, spoke to them quite plainly: "Lazarus is dead." Well, one would have thought that the fact that Lazarus was dead took away any and every excuse for returning to Judæa. So long as Lazarus was alive and could be helped there was perhaps some justification for it, but now that he was dead it was pure folly to go.

You remember that story in one of the books of Samuel about David and his sick child. So long as the child was ill, David fasted and prayed and lay all night upon the earth. But when the child was really dead, he arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his apparel. So long as there was hope for the child he prayed. But when the child died he submitted to God's Will and ceased to fast any more. Well, so long as Lazarus was within reach of help, the disciples could have understood their Master's desire to go to him even though they may have thought it very unwise; but since Lazarus was dead, there

was no further need to trouble. And when He told them plainly "Lazarus is dead," I rather think they expected Him to say, "Therefore we will abide where we are." But that was not at all what Jesus said. What Jesus said was this: "Lazarus is dead. . . . Nevertheless, let us go unto Him." I can fancy to myself the almost incredulous astonishment with which the disciples heard their Master say these words. They were accustomed to the idea of their Master's power over sickness and disease. But death was another and totally different matter. Death, as they thought of it, put a person clean beyond hearing and call. When death claimed Lazarus as a victim, there was nothing more to be said or done.

But that was not all our Lord's thought about death. Look at the exact words He uses. He does not say, "Lazarus is dead, nevertheless let us go thither"—that is, to Bethany. That would have been quite intelligible. If not in time to arrest the fatal progress of the disease, one could understand His desire to go to Bethany for the comfort of the sisters. But that was not what He said. He said a far more significant thing than that. "Lazarus is dead," He said; "nevertheless let us go unto him." It was to Lazarus He was going. "He fixes the thought of the disciples," says Westcott, "upon a real present relationship of Lazarus to them and to Himself." Death had not destroyed Lazarus. Lazarus had not ceased to be. The body lay in

the grave, it is true. But the real and essential Lazarus still lived. And he was within reach and within call. "Nevertheless," said Jesus, "let us go unto him." The assurance of immortality is in almost every line of this wonderful chapter. It shines upon us out of such a sentence as this. Personal conscious immortality is involved in this sentence: "Let us go unto him." There surely never was a more comforting, hope-inspiring "nevertheless" than that of this sentence. It tells us things are not what they seem. Death looks like destruction and the end of things. But it is not. The last word is not death, but life. Death snatches our dear ones from our side; nevertheless they live. We lay them in the cold, dark grave; nevertheless they are not there, but in the house of many mansions. To all appearance they are lost to us; nevertheless they are ours still, and nearer than we sometimes think. This conjunction is a challenge to death, it is a repudiation of death, it is a denial of death. "Lazarus is dead. . . . Nevertheless let us go unto him." Let us take to ourselves the comfort of it, and joyfully believe of our own lost and dear that, though we sometimes speak of them as dead, they are blessedly, consciously, personally alive.

There was something in the tone in which Christ said all this that made it clear to the disciples that remonstrance and persuasion were alike useless, that our Lord's mind was irrevocably made up.

Back into Judæa, no matter what the risk, they knew that He would go. The only question now was that of their own action. Would they go along with Him? Or would they think that discretion was the better part of valor and remain in the seclusion and safety of Peræa?

Their Lord was determined to go Himself, and He had invited them to accompany Him. But beyond the invitation there was no compulsion or constraint. It was entirely within their option whether they accompanied Him or not. And let no one think me fanciful when I say that there was debate and discussion among these loyal and well-meaning, but rather dull and slow men. You must not conclude that everything recorded in this chapter followed everything else without pause. There may have been quite a little interval between verse 15 and verse 16, while the disciples debated the pros and cons of the proposed journey. And I gather, from what Thomas said, that the dark and tragic possibilities were quite freely canvassed. One and another pointed out the risk. Indeed, it was more than a case of risk. It seemed to them as if a fatal termination was inevitable. And I do not think I am altogether fanciful in thinking that the feeling amongst the disciples on the whole was against taking the journey. I do not think I am doing them an injustice when I say that at this moment in Peræa they were very nearly anticipating the desertion of the Garden.

They were half minded to let Jesus take the journey alone. It was Thomas who saved them from that shame. He was not quick to talk. But he intervened to some purpose on that day. He rallied the fainting souls of his fellow-disciples. He persuaded them to be loyal whatever the risk. "Let us also go," he said, "that we may die with Him."

There are many things for which we have to be thankful to John's Gospel, and amongst other things we have to be thankful to him for his picture of Thomas. The other Evangelists tell us that Thomas was one of the Twelve, but beyond that bare fact they tell us nothing about him. He would have been a mere name but for John. But John preserves for us three incidents in which Thomas figured prominently, with the result that we have as vivid a mental picture of him as of any one of the Twelve. And it is a picture we would not have missed for much, a singularly arresting and appealing picture. In a sense you may say the picture of Thomas is given to us in this sentence. In a couple of swift strokes the Evangelist sets the man living and breathing before us. From this remark of his we can gather quite well the manner of man he was. Indeed, the two other incidents which John records do but fill in, and perhaps deepen, the lines of the picture given of him here. The essential Thomas is in this single sentence. It is noticeable that the personal name

of this disciple is not given us anywhere in the New Testament. For Thomas was not a personal name. It has become, of course, a personal name amongst us, but it was not a personal name as applied to this disciple. It was, shall I say, a sort of nickname. For *Thomas* is just the Hebrew name for "twin." There is an old tradition which says that his personal name was Judas. But popularly he was always known as "the Twin." The word "Didymus" is the Greek equivalent of Thomas, and also means "twin." It was, naturally enough, by the Greek form of the word that he was known amongst the Greek-speaking Christians of Asia Minor. And as this fourth Gospel was especially written for them, one can understand the way in which John introduces him: "Thomas who is called Didymus."

#### THOMAS'S DEVOTION

Now, what manner of man was Thomas, taking this sentence as our guide to his character? Well, first of all, he was a man of *great and unshrinking devotion*. I am sure the Christian Church has done less than justice to Thomas. It seems to have been Thomas's fate to be for ever identified with a nickname. He was called "the Twin" in the first century. He has been called "the Doubter" ever since. Of course, there is some justification for the nickname. He was the "doubter" in his attitude toward the resurrection of Jesus. All the same, to call

Thomas the "doubter" as if the sceptical mind was his chief characteristic is not only not to do justice to him, it is to give us an absolutely distorted picture of him. For the chief thing in Thomas was not his doubt, but his *great and unshrinking loyalty to his Lord*. It is this loyalty of his that shines forth in this incident. The other disciples were hesitating. The dangers of Judæa were frightening them. Even Peter and John were hanging back. But Thomas never wavered in his mind. He had no shadow of doubt as to what he should do. If Jesus went back to Judæa he was going with Him. They say that when the Scottish people signed the Solemn League and Covenant in the troublous Stuart days, some of them signed their names with their blood, and added the words "Until Death." Well, when Thomas gave himself to the service of Christ, he gave himself absolutely, altogether, and for ever. When Thomas put his hand to the plough he never dreamed of turning back. When he enlisted amongst Christ's followers, it was with the mental resolve that he was His "until death." And now death seemed to be the likely price of loyalty.

Thomas was at one with his fellow-disciples in this respect, that he anticipated the very worst results from the journey. He could see nothing but death as the inevitable end of their adventure. But perfect love had cast out all fear from the heart of Thomas. He was ready to pay the price of



loyalty. He was ready to face death for his Lord, but he would not leave Him. "Let us also go," said this brave and devoted man, "that we may die with Him." You remember the story of the blind King John of Bohemia at the Battle of Crécy. Four of his knights intertwined their bridles with his, resolved to share his fate whatever it might be. And so Thomas had intertwined his life with that of Jesus, and, come life or death, was resolved never to leave or forsake Him. If duty summoned Jesus to Judæa and to death, then to Judæa and death Thomas would go too. "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

And this is Thomas's great characteristic, not his doubt, but his devotion, to his Lord. You remember how Elijah on the last day of his life tried the loyalty of Elisha by inviting him to tarry at certain places and leave him to continue his journey alone. But Elisha's reply was ever the same: "As the Lord liveth and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Neither would Thomas leave his Master. He was prepared to go with Him to prison or to death, but not to desert Him on any wise. And this uttermost loyalty and devotion sprang from a deep and uttermost love. Thomas had his share of weaknesses and failings, but let this much, at any rate, be said to his credit: he loved Christ with a deep and passionate and enthusiastic love. He loved Christ better than anyone or anything else in the world. He was prepared to hate his

own life for that dear Lord's sake. And if in some respects Thomas is a warning to us, in *this* respect he is an example and a pattern. Thomas had the root of the matter in him, he had the one thing needful, for he had a supreme love for Christ. Do you remember that little poem of Watson Gilder, the American? It seems to me to breathe that spirit of devotion which speaks through these words:

"If Jesus Christ is a man,  
And only a man, I say  
That of all mankind I will cleave to Him,  
And to Him will I cleave away.  
If Jesus Christ is a God,  
And the only God, I swear  
I will follow Him through heaven and hell,  
The earth, the sea, and the air."

"Let us also go," said Thomas, "that we may die with Him."

#### THOMAS'S MELANCHOLY

But the other side of Thomas's nature is also revealed in this little incident—namely, his continual melancholy. I think again that we make a mistake in talking about Thomas's doubt, as if he were a man of intrinsically sceptical mind. I do not think that is the suggestion of Scripture at all. I think the suggestion of Scripture is that he was essentially a moody man. I have said it in print, in the little book I wrote upon the Twelve Apostles some years ago, that the key to Thomas's

character is his melancholy. "If to say *man* is to say melancholy," says Dr. Alexander Whyte, "then to say Thomas who is also called Didymus is to say *religious melancholy*." I think that is profoundly true. There are some unhappy people who seem constitutionally unable to see the bright side of things. They cannot see the sun for spots. They cannot see the blue sky for clouds. They always see the difficulties, the drawbacks, the obstacles, the sorrows, the griefs, the losses. We all have to pass through the valley of Baca, some time or other. But these dear people seem never to get out of the valley of weeping. We all know such people. We knew them even in connexion with the war—people who fastened their attention on all the gloomy portents and were quite blind to every encouraging sign, people of an essentially melancholy cast of mind.

Well, Thomas belonged to that depressed and rather depressing company. He was a man of melancholy mind. His doubts all sprang from his melancholy. The news of Christ's resurrection, for example, for one of his moody and melancholy temper, was too good to be true. I mentioned in that little book of mine on the Apostle, that I think John Bunyan has drawn Thomas to the very life for us in his picture of Mr. Fearing. I have been reading once again the vivid pages in which Mr. Fearing is described, and I have arisen from the perusal with the feeling confirmed that, to get the

right view of Thomas, no one could do better than read the passage in which Mr. Fearing is portrayed for us. This is what Greatheart says about him: "He was a man of choice spirit, only he was always kept very low, and that made his life so burdensome to himself and so troublesome to others." He went on to say "that Mr. Fearing was one who played upon the Base. He and his fellows sound the Sackbut, whose notes are more doleful than the notes of other musick are." ("Though indeed," Greatheart says, "some say the Base is the ground of musick.") "Only this was the imperfection of Mr. Fearing, he could play upon no other musick but this, till towards his latter end." There you have Thomas drawn as only the Tinker could have drawn him. Thomas was much addicted to the Base. He had not much use for the trumpet or the cornet or the cymbals. His favourite instrument was the sackbut. He could play nothing but the Base. You can hear his heavy Base booming through the sentence, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." "He was a man of choice spirit, only he was always kept very low." Thomas always took the gloomy view of things.

Look at the contrast here between what our Lord said and what Thomas said. The issue and result of the journey, according to our Lord, was this, "to the intent ye may believe." Thomas says, "Let us go that we may die." Jesus saw as the end of the journey a great quickening of *faith*; Thomas saw as the end of it a violent death. Upon which

Westcott remarks, "Thomas keeps strictly within the range of that which he knew. There was no doubt as to the hostility of the Jews. He will not go one step beyond that which is plain and open. He will die for the love which he has, but he will not affect the faith which he has not." He will die for the love which he has. Mr. Fearing in *Vanity Fair*, says John Bunyan, was like a man possessed. He wanted to fight with all the men in the fair, so hot was he against their fooleries. In that place of danger he was the bravest of the brave. Which is exactly Thomas as we get him here—ready to face death on his Lord's behalf. But death it was he foresaw. Christ's words "to the intent that ye may believe," with their suggestion of great events, fell on deaf ears. Judæa conjured up before him only the picture of murderous Jews with stones in their hands. And so melancholy deepened into doubt. He was little inclined, Godet says, "to subordinate the visible to the invisible." That is to say, Thomas had not that triumphant and exultant faith which in the deep midwinter can speak of the spring, and in the darkest night can be sure of the dawn, and in the day of reaction and defeat can be absolutely sure of victory. Thomas was apt to allow the facts that were nearest, the dark, disturbing, distressing facts of the immediate present, to absorb his thought and fill his entire horizon. The visible blotted out the invisible. The hostile Jews blotted out the thought of God. "Let us also go, that we

may die with Him." That was why Jesus said to him, in that wonderful interview after the Resurrection, "Because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

Now, what lessons can we gather from our study of this melancholy but devoted soul? I will just mention two, and that in the briefest possible fashion:

(i) We may imitate his courage. Things often-times look dark for us, as they looked dark for this man just at this point. But like him, in the dark days we can be loyal to Christ. When things are dark and difficult and doubtful, we can do this thing, we can cling to Christ. Though faint, we can still pursue.

(ii) And the second thing is this: We must deliberately discipline ourselves to cultivate the *hopeful spirit*. We must give the sackbut a rest and practise some brighter instrument. We must play on something else beside the Base. And *hope* is always born by looking beyond the encircling and immediate facts and remembering the invisible God. Let us lift our eyes above all disheartening circumstances; let us think not of the troubles that seem looming up before us. but of God Who in love gave His Son. Gloom and fear will vanish, confidence and courage will take their place. We shall cast the sackbut aside, and we shall make a joyful noise unto the Lord and shall "heartily rejoice in the Rock of our Salvation."

## VII

### JESUS AND MARTHA

"Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again."

JOHN xi. 16-26.

HITHERTO we have been confined to what Bishop Westcott calls the first scene, the prelude to the miracle. We have been occupied with the incidents in Peræa. Now, with verse 17, we enter upon the second scene and are transported to Bethany itself.

Nothing whatever is told us about the happenings on the journey from Peræa to Bethany! Perhaps nothing worth recording did happen, though dread foreboding, we may be quite sure, occupied the minds of the disciples. Nor is the Evangelist very precise in his marks of time. It would have been interesting to know how long they took upon the journey. The distance from Bethany beyond Jordan, to which place Jesus had retired, and the Bethany near Jerusalem in which the sisters lived, was about twenty-five miles. Did Jesus and His disciples take one or two days over the journey? Dr. McClymont thinks they took two days. There are just two chronological touches to guide us. The first is this, that after getting the news of Lazarus's

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sickness Jesus remained in the place where He was two days. The other is the one contained in this verse 17 which says that, when Jesus actually reached Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days already. Now, a person bringing an urgent message would be practically certain to do the journey in one day. Let us assume that is what happened, and that it was towards evening of that day Jesus got the news. It is quite likely that in the course of the day Lazarus died—that is, the great probability is that Lazarus was actually dead before Jesus even heard of his sickness. And, following Jewish practice, the dead man was buried before sunset of the day he died. After that we are told Jesus remained two days in Peræa. On the morning of the third day He said to His disciples, "Let us go to Judæa again," and they set out together. My own feeling is that they did not complete the journey on the day they started. There was not such need for hurry in their case as there was in the case of the messenger who brought news of Lazarus's sickness. They probably spent the night somewhere between the one Bethany and the other. Then perhaps halfway through the next day (for we must find time during that day for all the incidents recorded in this chapter) they arrived in Bethany. And that accords exactly with what the Evangelist says here, that when Jesus came He found that Lazarus had been in the tomb four days already.



I think this little touch about the four days is put in not simply to enable us to form clear conceptions of the sequence of events, but also to emphasise the wonder of the miracle. There is a sort of crescendo to be observed in the three miracles of resurrection which are recorded in the Gospels. In the case of the daughter of Jairus, the little one had only just died; the breath, one might say, had scarcely left the body. In the case of the widow's son of Nain, death had taken place some hours, and the body was being taken out to burial; but in the case of Lazarus death had held undisputed sway for four whole days, during which time the body had lain in the tomb.

Now, the two next verses are inserted to show how it was this great miracle became a test of unfaith and faith for the Jerusalem Jews, a kind of last appeal to them. For no one can read the Gospel narrative without seeing that this stupendous miracle had a great deal to do with Christ's Passion. It hurried on Christ's death. It revealed the unbelief of the Jews as bitter, obstinate, malignant. They would not be persuaded, though Lazarus rose from the dead. Now, the miracle could not have been such an appeal and such a test had it been wrought in some far-off corner of the land. For then the Jews (and it is always important to remember that by "Jews" John means the Jews of Jerusalem, Jews for the most part of the unbelieving sort) could not have witnessed it. But it was

wrought in Bethany. And Bethany, John tells us, was close to Jerusalem, only some fifteen furlongs, let us say two miles, off. And the result of its being so close was that many of the Jews had come out to Martha and Mary to sympathise with them.

It appears that the period of deep mourning amongst the Jews lasted seven days, and during those seven days it was customary for friends to pay formal visits of condolence. The Bethany family, we should gather from the various scattered references in the Gospels, occupied a comfortable social position: they were in "easy circumstances." They had plenty of friends and acquaintances in Jerusalem, and these Jerusalem friends of theirs were for the most part hostile to Jesus and His claims. Well, a number of these people ("many of them," John says) had come to Bethany on the very day on which Jesus arrived, in order to express their sympathy with the sisters. Thus they became spectators of the mightiest of Christ's miracles. By means of this last and greatest of miracles Christ made a sort of last appeal to them. He summoned them to believe. Bethany became the scene of the climax of the struggle between faith and unfaith. It became the final and most searching of tests. Some of them believed, to the saving of their souls. Some went away and told the Pharisees the things which Jesus had done. Jerusalem as a whole resisted even the appeal of such a miracle as this. Unbelief simply became bitter and desperate. "From

that day forth they took counsel that they might put Him to death." But it was an unbelief that was left absolutely without excuse.

Verses 17, 18, 19, are thus engaged with the setting of the scene. In verse 20 the action really commences. It was into the ears of Martha that the news of the arrival of Jesus first came. This was probably due to the fact that she was engaged in some domestic duty. Even in this time of sorrow Martha was still the busy housewife. Perhaps she got some relief from her sorrow in attending to the wants of these many friends who came to condole with them. Work is a great cure for care. And thus busying herself about household affairs, it is easy to understand how she should be the first to hear about the coming of Christ. Mary apparently was in some inner chamber absorbed in her grief. At once Martha got up and went and met Jesus. In her eagerness to meet Him she did not wait even to tell Mary that the Master had come. (In passing, it is worth noticing too that the actions of Martha and Mary, as John relates them here, harmonise exactly with the characters of the two sisters as those characters are depicted for us by St. Luke. Here, as in St. Luke, Martha is eager, bustling, practical; Mary is quiet, devoted, intense. The harmony is so real, and yet so obviously undesigned, that we feel we are dealing with real persons, and not with lay figures.) As soon as she got into the presence of Christ, Martha burst

out with the cry, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." All the commentators agree that we are not to interpret this sentence as a reproach or complaint. You notice what she says. She does *not* say, "Lord, if Thou hadst only come, my brother had not died." She does not blame Christ for His delay. She knew that if He had hurried to Bethany on the instant, He would not have been in time, because her brother was dead before the message reached Him. The words, Westcott says, "are a simple expression of faith and love." I do not know that I would put it exactly in that way. Because, if there is no complaint in the words, there is certainly regret in them. What Martha is doing here is expressing the wish, which anyone would have felt under the circumstances, that Jesus had been in Bethany when Lazarus was overtaken by his sickness. Because sickness stood no chance in the presence of Christ. Disease was always baffled when He was near. If Jesus had been in Bethany, it is quite true, in all probability, Lazarus would not have died. I agree it is not reproach or complaint, but it is regret that things had not fallen out differently. But regret is always unavailing. "It is of no use crying over spilt milk," we say. And I think this feeling of the futility of regret swept over Martha, and from the thought of the past she passes swiftly to the thought of the present, of what was still possible. She could not help wishing that Jesus had been present before

death had come; *but she had Him now*, and what was there that was not possible to Him? And so she proceeds: "And even now" (though death has taken place and seems to have ended everything), "even now I know that whatsoever Thou shalt ask of God, God will give it Thee."

Now, this is a most tremendous statement. The commentators try to account for it by saying that the messengers whom the sisters had sent to Jesus to report the sickness of Lazarus, when they came back, told them the strange words which Christ had spoken when He heard the news: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby"—and they suggest that certain vague but daring hopes of succour may have been kindled by them in the hearts of the sisters. But do we need any such explanation? Is not the fact that commentators feel that they have to account for great words like these coming from Martha, due to this, that they have never done justice to the character of Martha? We have written her down as the practical housekeeper, with perhaps not too vivid an interest in spiritual things. We have thought of Martha as *mundane* in contrast with her more spiritually-minded sister, Mary. I think we have got to revise our estimate of Martha. Yes, no doubt she was a bustling and active woman, but that did not prevent her from being at the same time a woman of mighty faith. Practicality and faith are

not antitheses. This woman who fussed about Christ's Supper had an almost limitless faith in Christ Himself. She had penetrated to the secret of His unique relationship to God. And it is therefore from her lips this tremendous, sweeping, uncompromising expression of faith comes. "And even now, I know that whatsoever Thou shalt ask of God, God will give it Thee."

I am disposed to say that on this occasion Martha showed a stronger faith even than Mary. Mary, when she came into the presence of Christ, gave expression to the same unavailing regret, using almost the identical words: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." And there she left it. For Mary there was nothing more to be said. Hope had been extinguished by death. There is no challenging "And even now" about Mary's speech. But Martha's faith in Christ persists even in face of the cold and tragic fact of death. Death cannot put limits on His power. Lazarus had been in the grave for four days, "but even now," said Martha, with a trust in Christ which was magnificent and sublime, "I know" (not "I think," or "I believe"), "I know that whatsoever Thou shalt ask of God, God will give it Thee." I think in face of this we shall have to drop our habit of describing Martha as the woman of business in contrast to Mary, the woman of faith and love. "Verily," it can be said of the woman who uttered this expression of trust in Christ's power,

"I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel."

I wonder what was in Martha's mind when she uttered these words? I wonder what she expected. Dr. McClymont says, "She had a vague hope of succour." That does not strike me as a particularly fitting comment on so triumphant and uncompromising a sentence as this. It was not a "vague hope" Martha had, but a "strong assurance." "I *know*" is her word, not "I think." But an assurance of what? I do not see how we can escape from the conclusion that Martha had such a faith in Christ as to believe that her brother, even in death, was not beyond the operation of His power, or the call of His voice. I am not prepared to say that she expected exactly what happened. The indefinite expression *whatsoever*, Godet says, leaves that which is too great to express to be understood. "Faith," says Westcott, "reaches forth to that which it does not grasp." Martha herself, let it be freely granted, did not know how Christ's power would be displayed. But she was sure Lazarus was not beyond reach of that power. She knew, as Godet admirably puts it, "that there must be no such thing as despair with a Being such as He is." And the reason for this daring and triumphant trust in Christ was that Martha had come to believe that Christ stood in an absolutely unique and solitary relationship to God. Again, I would not like to say, indeed I do not think it would be true to say, that Martha believed that Jesus Christ was Divine.

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She had no metaphysical doctrine of Christ's Deity. Had she believed that Jesus was God, the happy friendship that existed between them would have been impossible. But she *did* believe that Christ was nearer to God than anyone else. She *did* believe—nay, she did not *believe*, she knew—there was a communion, an intimacy between God and Jesus that was absolutely solitary and unique. She knew that in an unshared way He was the "beloved Son of God." And that was the ground of this mighty faith of hers. It was not simply that she had heard that, in other cases, Jesus had called people back from death. The repetition of the word "God" shows quite clearly that it was the relationship between Christ and God that was the ground of this glorious trust. "Even now, I know that whatsoever Thou shalt ask of God, God will give it Thee."

What a great thing it would be for us, if we had a faith anything like Martha's! It is true still that, whatsoever Christ asks of God, God gives it to Him. The Father heareth the Son always. The Father and the Son are one, and all the infinite power of God is at the Son's disposal. Why is it we are content to remain limp and feeble and poverty-stricken when we have a Christ Who is able to do anything and everything for us, and Who encourages us with a promise as mighty as this faith of Martha: "If ye ask anything in My Name, I will do it"?

In answer to this expression of Martha's faith,



our Lord replies, "Thy brother shall rise again." Now, I want you to notice that Jesus in the whole of this incident has more in His purpose than the mere raising of Lazarus, mighty though that deed was. He had also in mind the education of the faith of the sisters; and not only the faith of the sisters, but through His words to them, the faith of succeeding generations. He might have gone straight to the graveside and said, "Lazarus, come forth," and restored him to the sisters. That would have comforted their sorrow. But it would have left them still in bondage to certain mistaken notions about death and the Beyond. It would not have educated and clarified their faith. And it would have left us without great illuminating words which are the one and only sufficient comfort when death comes to us and ours. This whole narrative of the raising of Lazarus is more than an historic incident; it is also a parable, a parable of life through death. And you may say that the keynote of the parable is given here. In this sentence, Jesus begins the work of educating and enlightening Martha's faith. For very likely at this point, as Godet says, her faith was more real than enlightened. Before granting Martha her desire, our Lord endeavors to put her into that spiritual condition in which she shall be capable both of understanding and receiving. "Thy brother," He says, "shall rise again."

Now that, again, is a great and tremendous say-

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ing. Death is not the final word. Death is not the ultimate conqueror. Death is not to be able to hold the men and women whom it seizes in permanent bondage. Death claims everyone in turn, but it can permanently keep nobody. Life, not death, is the last word. "Thy brother shall rise again." How calm and quiet and assured the words are! Our Lord does not argue about immortality, He asserts it. Death had been the Sphinx whose riddle men had failed to solve through the generations. They speculated, they guessed, they hoped, but none of them knew. Jesus *knew*. He did not guess or speculate, He *was sure*. Here is the answer to the riddle of death: "Thy brother shall rise again." Mors, though clad in black armour and with a skull and crossbones on his breast, hides a youthful and blooming boy within. By this word Christ has transfigured life and banished the shadow from men's day.

But it was not enough for Martha. Godet makes it out that Jesus meant by His great word that He was about to raise Lazarus. And he goes on to say that Martha knew what He meant, but that with a view to getting a more explicit statement from Jesus, she pretended to think He referred to the last resurrection. I demur entirely to that explanation. Jesus in His great word was *not* referring to what was about to happen. He was stating a general truth, true of Lazarus, but true also of everyone else, that after death comes *resurrection*.

And it was as referring to that resurrection Martha understood it. Only she misunderstood what resurrection meant, or rather she mistimed it. The doctrine of the resurrection had come to be a fairly general article of belief amongst orthodox Jews at this time. And Martha shared in it. But resurrection in the conception of the Jews was something remote and distant. It was to take place at some far-off "last day." And somehow the thought of that remote resurrection did not bring much consolation to Martha's soul. "I know," she said, "that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day," as if to say, "There is not much comfort in that." There was her brother lying dead, and there he would lie for ages dead. What consolation did the hope of resurrection at the end of long ages give? Martha thought of the empty home, of the years of loneliness, of the generations of silence, and her doctrine of resurrection did not solace her much. And then Christ took this woman and opened her eyes to the great and blessed truth. He told her something which would have made her a happy, rejoicing, triumphant woman for the rest of her days even though Lazarus had never issued from his rocky tomb. He changed the very face of death. He transfigured the whole conception of the Beyond. He banished the very idea of long silence and unconscious sleep. For this is what He said: "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he die, yet shall he live: and

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whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die."

I am not going at the very end of this sermon to attempt to expound these great and blessed words. They demand a sermon to themselves. One point only will I dwell upon now, and it is this: Martha made the resurrection an event in some far-off future. Between the present and that "last day," when the resurrection was to take place, there stretched ages of silence, and (apparently) unconsciousness, and separation. Such a resurrection did little to warm or comfort the soul. Jesus translates the resurrection from the *future to the present*. It is not something that takes place at some "last day," it is present and immediate. After the grave, according to the popular belief, came long silence and unconsciousness. Jesus peopled the Beyond *with life*. "*I am the Resurrection and the Life.*" I do not know that we have even yet risen to the height of this glorious assurance. We talk still as if our dead were asleep and unconscious; as if all the years between now and the "last day" had to elapse before they arose to life. But the glorious truth is that resurrection is not a future event, it is an immediate and present experience. The fact is death does not touch those who are in Christ at all. "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." It would greatly help us all in troublous times like these, it would greatly help us to bear our griefs and sorrows, if we could emanci-

pate ourselves from this notion of long ages of silence, and believe in the reality of life. There is a popular funeral hymn which ends, "Leave we now Thy servant sleeping," as if he were to lie in the grave till the last trump. But that is not so. Death is a sleep followed swiftly by an awakening. And when our dear dead awake they are satisfied with God's likeness. Death is an experience, not a state; an act, not a condition. They die to live, to live richly, gloriously, consciously, everlastingly. At this moment they are gloriously and blessedly alive. They do not lie in any grave. They have gone to be with Christ, which is far better. "*I am,*" said Jesus, "the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

## VIII

### RESURRECTION AND LIFE

"Jesus said unto her, I am the Resurrection and the Life."  
JOHN xi. 25, 26.

I COME now to the discussion of that great, that tremendous word in which our Lord crowns and completes His revelation to Martha. You will bear in mind what I tried to say in the previous sermon, that our Lord had more in view than the mere raising of Lazarus (mighty deed though that was): He had also in view the development of Martha's faith, the enlightenment of her mind, and through her the enlightenment of succeeding generations, as to the true relations of Life and Death and Resurrection. He might have gone straight to the graveside and said, "Lazarus, come forth," without even meeting Martha, without engaging in such a colloquy as this. He might have surprised the weeping sisters by bringing Lazarus back with Him to the house safe and well. By so doing He would have brought comfort for the immediate sorrow. But He would have left them defenceless against a second assault of death. When death returned to their house (as it was bound some day to return),

their grief was bound to be as deep and as bitter and as hopeless as it was just now. Jesus was intent upon doing more than comfort the immediate grief. He was intent upon giving them such a revelation of life and death as would garrison their hearts with the peace of God even when death came again. It was not simply healing for the present hurt Jesus wished to give; He wished to give healing balm for stricken and bleeding hearts in every age and place. And this He did by talking with Martha about the nature of death and life and resurrection.

"Death . . . Life . . . Resurrection"—they are on the whole the most tremendous words in human speech. And they are all three in this sentence which Jesus spoke to Martha: "Death . . . Life . . . Resurrection"; for these are the three things upon which men most eagerly crave light. "Death . . . Life . . . Resurrection"—to know the truth about these things is in very deed to be set gloriously free. Now, just because our Lord is here dealing with such tremendous themes, I feel the inadequacy of speech to deal worthily with them. Indeed, it is not an inadequacy of speech only, it is the inadequacy of human reason as well. The words, as Bishop Westcott says, transcend our powers, and they involve truths of which we can hold firmly but a very little.

"There's a deep below the deep,  
And a height beyond the height,

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And our hearing is not hearing,  
And our seeing is not sight."

Gleams of the glory are all we can discern. It is with that consciousness of inadequacy resting heavily upon me that I invite you to meditate with me upon these great words.

You will remember that, in answer to our Lord's assurance, "Thy brother shall rise again," Martha had replied, "I know that he shall rise again at the last day." She believed, she said, in that far-off resurrection. She did not believe that Lazarus had come to the final end. A day would come, a remote and distant day, when he would be summoned out of death into life. But the thought of that far-removed "last day" brought Martha little consolation in face of the immediate and present and heart-breaking loss. It was in reply to that word of Martha's about a postponed resurrection that Jesus said: "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." And the first thing I want you to notice is this:

### CHRIST OFFERS HIMSELF TO MARTHA

Our Lord turns the thought of Martha from some distant resurrection-day to *Himself*. All that she could desire for Lazarus she already possessed in Him. The resurrection was not some far-off event, it was not something for which He had to



ask the Father, it was *present and actual in Himself*. "He seeks to exchange adherence to a doctrinal truth," says Godet, "for confidence in Himself." That was ever Christ's way. He offered Himself as the answer to men's questions and the final satisfaction of their needs. When the people of Galilee said, "Evermore give us this bread," He said to them, "I am the Bread of Life." When the people were torn and distracted by doubt, not knowing which way to turn, not knowing what to believe, He offered Himself as their sufficient Guidance, saying, "I am the Light of the world." When Thomas complained that they really did not know the way to the Father He said: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life." When Philip said that, if they could only get a glimpse of the Father, their hearts would be at rest, He said, "I and the Father are One." He was always offering Himself as the food for men's souls, and the satisfaction of their needs. The answer to their cravings and questions was not in any doctrine, but in *Him*. No teacher was ever like Jesus in this respect. Other teachers kept themselves in the background. It was to the truth they taught, and not to the person of the teacher they called attention. But it was wholly different with Jesus. He offered men, not abstract truth, but just Himself. "Thou, O Christ, art all I want, more than all in Thee I find," is the cry of the believing and adoring soul. But let us not forget that it was also the tremendous claim Christ

made for Himself that all we want for life and death we find in Him. I am not going to stay to discuss the implications of these tremendous claims, except to say just this, that we cannot account for them at all, and retain our belief in Christ's sanity and goodness, except by saying that He knew Himself to be more than man, except by confessing with the Holy Church that He was the Everlasting Son of the Father.

So in this conversation with Martha He offers Himself as the answer to her doubts and fears: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." The resurrection was not some remote event; it was something actual and existent in Him. It was not something for which He needed to ask the Father, it was resident in Himself. It was not even anything which He had to work. It was something which was *there*. For He does not say, "I promise" or "I procure" or "I bring," but "*I am*" the Resurrection and the Life. I think what our Lord wished Martha to understand was that at that very moment, though his body was in the tomb, Lazarus was alive because he was in touch with Himself. The permanent teaching of the sentence is twofold: that resurrection is not future, but present, and that the resurrection is in Christ. Before, however, I begin to dwell upon certain great truths which the verse clearly conveys, I had better perhaps proceed with the exposition that we may gain a fairly complete idea of what was in Christ's mind.

## RESURRECTION AND LIFE

Our Lord does not content Himself with saying that He is the Resurrection. He says that He is the "Resurrection and the Life." Now, which one of these two great terms is the *prior* term? I mean the prior in logical order. Godet was once inclined to think that Resurrection was the prior term, and that Life was that to which resurrection admitted men. But in the edition of his Commentary which I use, he retracts that early opinion of his and adopts the view of Bishop Westcott (which, I think, is certainly the true one) that *Life* is really the prior term. I mean that *Life* is the cause and *Resurrection* the consequence, and not vice versa. Jesus is not the Life because He is the Resurrection, but He is the Resurrection because He is the Life. This idea of *Life* is one of the dominating ideas of the fourth Gospel. It leaps out in the very opening verses of the Prologue. "In Him was life," says John. It is the subject of great tracts of Christ's teaching. Life was, from one point of view, *the gift* He had come to bestow, *Life resided in Christ*. With us it is derived; with Him it was original and natural. Christ was not a stream, He was a source. Just exactly as God had life in Himself, so was it given to the *Son to have life in Himself*. It was life underived, uncreated, self-existent, eternal. And this life Christ had it in His power to bestow. He could give it because He pos-

sessed it. And the life which He gave was in quality like His Own.

Human beings can propagate life. Life descends. One generation gives birth to another. But it is only mortal, transient, perishing, sinful life that parents can impart to their child. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." But the life which Christ gives is like His Own. It is eternal life. "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." There is no need to go into the ancient controversies about the strict meaning of the word "eternal." There is very little in it, anyway. Let us quite freely admit that the word "eternal" lays chief stress upon the *quality* of life rather than the quantity of it. It is a life to be measured, as Dr. Dods says, not by the ages of its continuance, but by its *depth*. It is the Divine life, Christ's Own life in the soul. It is Christ living in us. "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me." That is the *life* which Christ gives, and it is a *present possession*. It is not a future bestowment. He gives it to the believing soul here and now. Is it too bold to say many of us in this service, perhaps most of us, *enjoy the eternal life now?* We are conscious of fellowship and communion with God. We enjoy the presence of Christ in our souls. We have the Son, and therefore have the Life.

Now, the point to notice about this life is that it is beyond the reach of death. Death cannot touch it. That is why I said a moment ago that

there was very little in the controversy about the meaning of the word *eternal*. The word does certainly refer primarily to the *quality* of life, but the quality carries the quantity along with it. I mean that the eternal life is necessarily the immortal life. Death has as little to say to it as it has to the life of God Himself. It is the Divine life, and as such clean beyond the sphere of death. Our Lord's Own words convey the double idea: "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." That is Christ's conception of things. The idea of immortality is contained and involved in the idea of life. Life is a present thing, and its continuance is a matter of course. That is why He says here, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." If He had given *life* to anybody, *resurrection* was simply bound to follow—a present, not a far-off, resurrection, such as Martha thought of. Because He had given *life*, the eternal life, to Lazarus, because Lazarus had received Christ into his soul, therefore at that moment he was *risen*, he was gloriously and blessedly alive unto God, though his body lay in the tomb. What Jesus did by His act of calling Lazarus back to this earthly life again was not to call into new being a life which had ceased to be, but to reveal to Martha that, on the other side the grave, those whom we call dead are still alive. On the farther side of death, Lazarus was then enjoying the risen life. The eternal life carried with it the idea of resurrection. It was a present and im-

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mediate experience. "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

### NO DEATH AT ALL

In the next verse our Lord proceeds to apply that truth to the facts of human experience. He comes to treat of *death*. He looks at it in the light of the fact that He is the Resurrection and the Life, and it is not too much to say that He abolishes it. No, He has not taken away that death which is the mere dissolution of our earthly existence. But at any rate it has ceased to be the ugly, grisly thing men mean by death. See what He says, "He that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live." I think He has Lazarus in mind in this half of the sentence. That is what people said of Lazarus, that he was dead. But Lazarus *believed on Christ*. He was in *vital union with Christ*. The eternal life of Christ was in him. Therefore death could not really touch him. "Though he die," said Jesus, "yet shall he live." Our Lord, though perhaps He had the case of Lazarus specially in His mind, states the truth in general and universal form. That accounts for the future tense. "He *shall* live" does not refer to some far-off time as if there was a long interval between the dying and the living. Life is put in the future because death is in the future too. The case is put hypothetically. I shall not be violating the meaning of the sentence by translating like this: "He that believeth on Me, though

he die, yet shall he go on living." The life Christ has given to him is an immortal life. It is clean beyond the reach of death to touch.

Then He adds this further sentence, "And whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." In the first limb of the sentence our Lord was thinking of the dead Lazarus. In this limb He is thinking of those who loved Him and believed on Him who were still alive. In the first sentence He comforts us about our dead: they are not dead, He says, but alive. In the second He comforts us about ourselves who yet remain. "You shall never die at all," He says. And, once again, by that He does not mean that our physical life will not come to an end, that soul and body will not dissolve partnership. For those who believe on Christ, in common with those who do not believe on Him, there is a grave waiting somewhere, there is a day ahead when those who look out of the windows shall be darkened and the doors shall be shut in the streets; there is a time coming when our place will be empty and we shall be no more seen in our familiar haunts. But we shall not die. Death is not the end of us. The grave and long silence are not the finish. We shall never die. We have a life within us over which death exercises no power. That life at death gets its chance. It blossoms out into something richer and fairer than anything this earth has ever witnessed. Death has nothing to say to us any more. *Life* is our portion, not death. Even the

physical act of dying is not dying in the terrifying and awful sense of the term. Death is really the wages of sin, and from *death* in that tragic sense the believing man is for ever emancipated. Death ceases to be dreadful. It becomes "ours," as St. Paul puts it, our friend, our possession. It is just the portal that admits us into eternal light and joy. But there is no cessation of being. There is no lapse of conscious life. Life flows on; only the stream becomes fuller and richer. "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Those, then, are the two tremendous truths which our Lord enunciates here. Resurrection is a present, not a future experience, and that resurrection is in Himself. Resurrection is a present, not a future experience. That is not necessarily to repudiate some last day in which all souls shall once again be "clothed upon" with their habitation which is from Heaven. But the *risen life*, which is the essential thing, is present and immediate. I am struck by the fact that as he grew older the Apostle Paul came to emphasise more and more the present reality of the risen life. In his earlier letters, while his Rabbinical training was still strong upon him, he had a great deal to say about a final resurrection, but in his later years he puts the emphasis on the permanence of his life in Christ. That is



what death means to him, *to depart and be with Christ*. He knew that his life was beyond the reach of death, *because it was hid with Christ in God*. And that is the truth Christ would have us learn here. The idea of resurrection, of immortality, is involved in the very idea of life. There is no breach, no cessation of existence. Death has no dominion over those who have received life from Christ. It flows on, only enriched and deepened and enlarged. Let us take the truth to our own sad hearts: "He that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live," and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

And the second truth is this, that *Resurrection and Life are in Christ*. "He that believeth in Me . . . shall never die." He is the Source and Giver of life. And it is by union with Him men are lifted above the power of death. Now, I know that at this point I seem to be confronted with a thorny, knotty, theological problem. There are a great many earnest people who hold what is known as the "Life in Christ" theory. They say immortality is conditional on union with Christ, and that the lot of those who are not in union with Christ is annihilation. I am not going to discuss the theory. All I will say of it is that the Christian soul revolts against the whole idea of annihilation. My own feeling is that the theory is right in its positives, but wrong in its negatives, as, indeed, most theories are. Life is conditional upon union with Christ—that is

undoubtedly true. Eternal life is His gift. We had better be content with that, and not proceed to say that all who are not consciously united by faith to Christ are doomed to final death.

As a matter of fact, every bit of moral and spiritual life any soul possesses—and there is no soul without any—is derived from Christ. He is the Light which lighteth every man. He has set eternity in every man's heart. And no one can be utterly destroyed who has got even a spark of that Divine life in him. But it is conscious faith in Christ, real union with Him, that brings eternal life in its fullness and blessedness, that banishes death and makes resurrection a glad and present experience. "He that liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." This personal relationship between Christ and the soul is the guarantee of immortality. It is an assurance often emphasised in the Bible: "I am the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." That personal relationship was the ground of faith in the continued life. God would never let His friends go. "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." In exactly the same way, a living union with Christ is the guarantee of life. So long as we are in Him, so long as we love Him and trust Him, so long as we have committed ourselves to Him and received Him into our souls, we need trouble about nothing. We can trust Him: "No one shall pluck you out of My hands."

"Believest thou this?" said Jesus to Martha. **It**

was a searching question. Martha did not answer with a simple "Yes." I don't know whether she really grasped all the Lord had said to her. I don't know whether she understood all that was meant by His claim to be the Resurrection and the Life. And in her reply she does not claim a faith which she did not feel, or an understanding of truths which were yet mysteries to her. In answer to Christ she does not say, "Yea, Lord, I believe." What she *does* say is this: "Yea, Lord, I have believed that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, even He which cometh into the world." "I have learned," she says, "to believe in Thee as the Christ of Whom all the prophets have spoken, the Christ Who is to bring God and man together." She did not understand all Christ said, but she had limitless faith in the Speaker. She did not take in all the wonder of this revelation, but she trusted Him. "Believest thou this?" "I believe Thee," was the reply. And it was a great reply. And it was a sufficient faith. Have we got a faith like it? "Believest thou this?" Christ says to us. And perhaps, like Martha, we feel there is much that we do not understand. There are problems we cannot unravel, and mysteries we cannot explore. What questions we would like to ask about death and the Beyond! The books that pretend to tell us something, by the very vogue they have, show how greatly men and women want to know! But if we cannot know everything, we know *Christ*. We know

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His love, His grace, His power. We know Who He is, the Son of God, proved to be such by the resurrection from the dead. And like Martha in answer to His question, "Believest thou this?" we can say, "Yea, Lord, I believe Thee"; and we can leave it all there in quiet, happy confidence and trust.

"Our knowledge of that life is small,  
The eye of faith is dim.  
But 'tis enough that He knows all,  
And we shall be with Him."

## IX

### JESUS AND MARY

"When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled."—JOHN xi. 28-33.

IN the last chapter we completed our consideration of our Lord's interview with Martha. Our Lord's revelation of Himself as the Resurrection and the Life, His assurance to her that resurrection and life were great and present realities, and that everyone united to Him by faith was beyond the reach of death, brought great comfort to Martha's soul. She did not understand all that was involved in what Christ said, but she implicitly believed the Speaker, and she was quite content with that. Jesus by that talk had done great things for Martha. He had really lifted the load. He had taken away death's sting and robbed the grave of its victory. I do not myself think that Martha expected Jesus to raise Lazarus from the tomb. The whole trend of the narrative is against any such supposition. But if Jesus had done nothing beyond giving this great revelation about resurrection and life, He had done infinite things for Martha: He had brought

peace and a triumphant joy back to her stricken soul.

It was just because Christ's revelation of resurrection and life had brought this radiant comfort to her own soul, that just at this point she cuts the interview short in order that she may fetch her sister, Mary. When the announcement of the Master's arrival was first made, Martha was so full of her own sorrow that she never stayed to call Mary. Sorrow is proverbially self-centred. But now that joy and hope had come back to her soul, she thought of her sister sitting in the shadowed home, absorbed and engrossed in her grief. Martha felt that she had no right to enjoy her new happiness while her sister was a prey to grief and a broken heart. The impulse to share her joy was strong and irresistible. It was a day of glad tidings, and she must go and tell.

So John tells us that as soon as she had said this—that is, as soon as she had given expression to her happy and glad faith in Christ—"she went away and called Mary her sister." She went away because, as Westcott puts it, "her faith, answering to the revelation, left nothing more to be said. She had risen above her private grief." Christ had told her things that had changed night into day, and gloom to gladness. What she most wanted after that was to share her joy with her sister. "She went away and called Mary." Joy is always to be shared—especially the joy of salvation. If we have

heard Christ speak things that have brought sunshine into our lives, and given us radiant hope in sorrow, and victory in face of death, it is our business to think of others crushed, broken, despairing, and to call them to Him Who can give the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Marys abound in these days. The sorrowing, the grief-stricken, the broken-hearted, are a great host. Let us call them to Him Who is sorrow's Morning Star.

Martha called Mary "secretly." It may be, as the commentators suggest, that the secrecy of the call was due to a fear of complications through the hostility of the Jews from Jerusalem who had come to sorrow with them. There might be danger to Christ if they knew that He was in the neighbourhood. I say that may have been the reason for this "secret" call. But I find reason enough in the fact that Martha wanted Mary to have the same sort of interview with Christ that she herself had enjoyed. You cannot have intimate heart-to-heart speech in the presence of a crowd. I find it, for example, extraordinarily difficult to speak about sacred things in hospitals, when the occupants of other beds are within earshot. The deepest, most precious, most intimate things are always "whispered in the ear." And I think that was why Martha called Mary "secretly," that her interview with Jesus might have the intimacy that nothing but privacy can give. "The Master," she said to her sister, and the name is

worth noticing (that is how His friends and followers evidently spoke of Him); "the Master is here, and calleth thee." Martha sought her sister, not simply on her own impulse, but also at her Lord's bidding. He has always an eye for the missing one. He is always thinking of the person who is *not there*. "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold." He is always eager to impart His blessing and comfort to them. While busy building up Martha's faith, He thought of Mary sitting in broken-hearted despair in the home. He knew her sensitive spirit. He knew how the grief would crush her. And He longed to cheer and comfort her. "The Master is here, and calleth thee."

I am sorely tempted to stay and preach a little homily on this phrase. I spoke a moment ago about the impulse we have to share a joy, upon the obligation that rests on us all to communicate good news. But let us remember that it is not *we* alone who are moved with pity and compassion for the sorrowing and the stricken and the desolate; Christ is moved with a deeper compassion still. He longs to communicate His comfort to them. The Master "calls" for all the lonely and the desolate, and you and I are just the messengers by whom the "call" is to be taken. Really in this little phrase lies the hope of comfort for the world—"the Master is here," in the midst of all the welter and agony and suffering and sorrow of the present hour; "the Master is here," and if you are the person in whose heart



sorrow has found a lodging, if you are the suffering, agonising soul, well, He calls specially "for thee." But I resist the temptation to dwell upon this beautiful phrase, in order to proceed with my exposition.

As soon as ever Mary heard the news that Jesus had arrived, she at once got up and hastened to Him. The terms of this verse, Westcott remarks, are singularly vivid. It reveals Mary's lively emotion, says Godet. It breathes of eagerness, let us say. There was nothing Mary had desired more than the presence of Jesus, and when the intimation of His arrival was made, she lost not an instant in hurrying to His presence. The Evangelist at this point inserts a verse to say that Jesus had not yet entered Bethany. He had lingered outside the village. He wanted to meet with the sisters away from the crowd of mourners, and quite possibly He did not want to do anything that would attract notice or create a tumult. Anyhow, it was in some quiet spot outside the village that He had had His conversation with Martha, and it was in the same spot He awaited Mary's coming. But the privacy which Martha enjoyed was denied to Mary. For though Martha had called her secretly, her rising up had been noticed by the Jews who had come to sorrow with the sisters. Apparently, like Job's friends, these mourners were in the house, perhaps in the room, trying to comfort Mary by their sympathy. Seeing her thus suddenly rise up, and see-

ing that she laboured under strong emotion, they concluded that she was going to indulge her sorrow at her brother's tomb (the verb translated "weep" is a strong word; it suggests the "sobbing" and "wailing" which were such marked features of Jewish lamentation), and so they followed her, as they thought, to weep with her. And so it came about that our Lord's own emotion and the mighty miracle that followed enjoyed a publicity that Christ Himself neither intended nor sought, but which was nevertheless in God's design. "Jesus acted as He ought," says Godet; "God acted as He pleased." It was the publicity thus given to this mightiest of miracles that gave it the nature of an appeal to the Jerusalem Jews, an appeal so clear, so convincing, as to leave them without excuse.

When Mary reached the Lord's presence, she flung herself at His feet in the intensity of her emotion, and said exactly what her sister had said before her, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." It shows what these two stricken sisters had said one to another during the days or hours of their brother's sickness. It was their constant thought, their absorbing desire—"If only Jesus was here"; and so each of them expresses exactly the same regret when they come into the presence of Christ. But there the similarity between the sisters ends. They were contrasted characters, and the contrast comes out in their actions and their words, and also in Christ's treatment of

them. Let me point out two or three of these little points of contrast, which accord so well with the picture of Martha and of Mary which we get in the other Evangelists.

(a) To begin with, Mary's grief is much more passionate and abandoned than that of Martha. Martha was quiet and restrained. We do not read about Martha "wailing," and we do not read about her casting herself down at Jesus' feet. But Mary did both. As soon as she came into the presence of Christ, she flung herself down at His feet, and her grief expressed itself in a perfect passion of weeping. Godet characterises Martha's faith as "masculine." I do not know that the adjective is particularly fitting. But he is not far from the truth when he says that, in contrast, Mary's is a nature wholly feminine. And, he adds, like all persons of sensitive disposition, she makes no energetic effort to conquer the depression which had overwhelmed her, but she lets herself fall, as Martha had not done, at Jesus' feet. There is that obvious difference between the sisters, the one strong and calm even in her grief, the other demonstrative and passionate.

(b) Then, in the second place, Mary's grief is more hopeless than Martha's. Both sisters when they came into the presence of Christ said, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." But Martha went on at once to add, "But even now I know that whatsoever Thou shalt ask of,

God, God will give it Thee." Even in the face of death and the tomb, Martha's faith in Christ remained firm and unshaken. But Mary said, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," and she left it at that. She had no word of faith or hope to speak; only that word of unavailing regret. Death had extinguished hope. Mary does not seem to have dreamed that anything could be done now that Lazarus had been in the grave four days. Her sorrow was deep, dark, and unrelieved. There was nothing left to do but to weep. I said in a previous sermon that we should have to revise our estimate of Martha. She was not simply a busy, bustling housewife. She was a woman of great faith and hope. She had a stronger and more lively faith in Christ even than Mary had. Of the trinity of graces, faith, hope, and love, Martha had the larger share of the two former. And yet, in spite of that, if we have to place the sisters, perhaps Mary is to be placed first, because while faith, hope, and love, are the permanent and abiding Christian virtues, the greatest of these is love.

(c) In the third place will you notice the contrast in our Lord's treatment of the sisters, arising out of the difference in their characters and dispositions! For Christ does not deal with all people in exactly the same way. He adapts His treatment to the peculiar character of the person with whom He deals. Like a skilful physician, He diagnoses the trouble before He prescribes the remedy. And it

is not one invariable method of treatment He has for everybody. He varies the treatment to meet the peculiar necessities of the case. To the impetuous and impulsive volunteer He speaks of the hardships and difficulties of the Christian life; to the man of laggard and halting spirit He issues an imperious and immediate summons, and bids him leave the dead to bury their own dead. So here, He treats the sisters quite differently. Martha, with her sane, strong nature, with her strong though unillumined faith, was in the condition to be able to receive instruction and to profit by it. So to the task of educating and developing that faith which was already there, Jesus devoted Himself. But Mary had no faith to be educated; and at this moment she was in no need of education, she could not have received it. She was just broken and overwhelmed with her grief. What Mary wanted at this moment was not education, but loving sympathy, and that is exactly what Christ gave her. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." Sympathy and action were what Mary needed then. So He wept in sympathy with her sorrow, and, to comfort her stricken soul, said to the man who had lain in the tomb four days, "Lazarus, come forth." It is just a perfect example of our Lord's tact and wisdom and exquisite sympathy. He has not one rough-and-ready method

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with everyone. He knows what is in man, and He deals with each according to his idiosyncrasy and need.

And now I want to examine a little more closely verse 33, which speaks of Jesus as groaning in spirit and troubling Himself at the sight of the weeping Mary, and her weeping and wailing companions. It is not altogether an easy verse to interpret accurately. The difficulty centres in the word, which is translated "groaned." The word is used in three other places in Scripture. In two of them it is translated "strictly or sternly charged"—in connexion with the healing of the blind man and of the leprous man. Jesus "strictly charged" them that they should tell no man. In the other place it is translated "murmured." When the disciples saw what Mary did at the feast when she broke the alabaster box of ointment, "they murmured against her." In all these instances there is "the notion of coercion springing out of displeasure." So that, as Westcott says, the word carries with it the notion of antagonism, indignation, anger. It was not simple sorrow or grief that Jesus displayed at the sight of Mary's weeping, there was an element of indignation in it as well.

Then there is the difficulty about the word "spirit" which follows. The word in the Greek is in the simple Dative. There is no preposition "in." The "in" is our revisers' translation of what they take to be the meaning of the Dative. But some say

that "spirit" is the object of the verb, not the sphere within which the emotion was displayed. They would translate "He sternly checked His spirit." And the interpretation they put on it is this. They say that our Lord's natural inclination was to exercise His Divine power at once, and so put an end to Mary's heart-broken grief. But "He sternly checked his spirit," and, as Westcott says, "first voluntarily brought Himself into complete sympathy with the sorrow which He came to relieve." He checked His first impulse to exercise His power, in order that in sheer but dear human sympathy He might weep with Mary. But though that interpretation has a good deal to say for itself, on the whole I think we had better agree with our English translators that the spirit was the sphere within which the emotion revealed itself. "He groaned in indignant emotion in His spirit."

But now we come to the question which this interpretation inevitably raises—what was the cause of this element of indignation in our Lord's emotion? With whom or with what was He indignant? Some are inclined to say that He was indignant at the hypocrisy of the weeping and wailing on the part of the Jews who were present. But the narrative does not justify that in the slightest. There was no hypocrisy in the weeping. These Jews were genuinely sympathetic, and the "weeping" of the Jews, as Godet says, stands in relation

to the "weeping" of Mary, not by way of contrast, but agreement.

Others think that the indignation was due to His sense of the unbelief present in the minds of the Jews, and even of Mary herself. But again there is no support for this explanation. The emotion was stirred by the sight of sorrow as sorrow, and not as unbelief or distrust or disappointment. Others, again, think that our Lord was moved to indignation at the sight of the triumph of evil and death; that He saw in the tragic sorrow before Him the result of the Devil's handiwork, which had brought sin into the world and death through sin, and He was indignant at the havoc wrought by him; He was indignant that the destiny of man should be so blighted, and that God's purposes for him should be so perverted. I believe this latter is the right interpretation. Our Lord was angry that death should be here at all, He was angry that death should be able to claim His friend, He was angry that death should be able to fill the world with lamentation and woe. He was angry with the sin, and the personal spirit of evil, which had brought about this tragedy.

All this is in strict accordance with the teaching of the Bible. Death is not here by God's Will at all. Tears and partings and graves and cemeteries are no part of His plan. In the land where His Will is perfectly done there is no death, there is no pain there is no sighing, there are no tears. These



tragic things are clean passed away. God's purposes for man did not embrace death. I do not mean to suggest that, had man not fallen, his life on earth would have been endless. But the end would not have been death—that grisly, ugly thing we call death. Death is the enemy's work. You may say of the graves and cemeteries with which our world is filled, of the tears and agonies with which it abounds, "an enemy hath done this." They are the work of the evil one. They are the bitter fruit of sin. I read in the papers the other day an account of the ruin and havoc effected by the Germans before they made their great retreat on the Somme. They blew up every cottage, they reduced villages to heaps of ruins, they wantonly destroyed the fruit-trees, they turned what had once been a smiling and fruitful company into a blasted and desolate desert. And the soul of the man who described the ruin was so hot with indignation that the very words in which he described it seemed to scorch and burn. Well, Jesus looked upon human life. He knew what God meant it to be, a fair and beautiful and happy thing. And He saw it *as it was*, full of sorrows and agonies unspeakable, and shadowed by the great horror of death. And as He looked upon it, as He saw in the frantic weeping of Mary and the Jews the evidence of the ruin, He grew indignant at the evil which had caused the tragedy—"He groaned in spirit."

We are so accustomed to the thought of sin and

sorrow and death, that we take it all for granted. It ought, however, to stir a sacred and holy wrath in our souls. Sin, sorrow, and death—they are interlopers in this world of ours. They are not here by God's intention. They are the bitter fruit of sin. It is only as we preserve this sense of indignation that we shall battle against the sin from which all our sorrows derive.

"He groaned in the spirit and was troubled." The Greek says, "He troubled Himself." The commentators think this means that a visible shudder passed over Him. He shook with a sense of the horror of it all. That there may have been such a visible shudder is quite likely. But it is not the visibility of His horror that the peculiar turn of the Greek phrase suggests, but the voluntariness of it. Augustine's comment seizes the significant point. "Those are troubled," he says, "involuntarily; Christ was troubled because He willed it." He troubled Himself. He freely took upon Himself these troubles and sorrows to which others are subject; Himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases. He did not choose to dwell aloof, care-free, unconcerned. He "troubled Himself." He put Himself in our place. He made our pains and sorrows His very Own. He made our death His Own. In no other way could He have redeemed us. "He bore our sins and carried our sorrows, and the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Anger, sacred indignation against the sin that

ravaged human life, and an infinite pity for the men whose lives had been thus ravaged, breathe through this verse, "He groaned in the spirit and troubled Himself." And to deliver them from sin's ruin and curse, He "troubled Himself" to the extent of taking it all on His own head and heart. And by so doing He has abolished death and taken away the condemnation to which man was exposed, and changed the ravaged desert of his life until it rejoices and blossoms like the rose.

## X

### THE TEARS OF JESUS

"Jesus wept."—JOHN xi. 34, 35.

I FINISHED the preceding sermon by discussing the reason for that overwhelming emotion which shook Christ's fame when He saw Mary weeping at His feet, and the Jews also weeping which came with her. There was anger in His emotion. It was not simple grief. "He chafed with indignation in His spirit, and troubled Himself." And we found the secret of His indignant emotion in His sense of the ruin and sorrow and death with which sin had filled the world. Jesus was indignant with it all. In the dead Lazarus, in the weeping Mary, our Lord saw evidences of the havoc wrought by evil. Suppressing this emotion, however, He addressed to Mary and those who stood by the question, "Where have ye laid him?" And they replied in words reminiscent of Philip's reply to the scepticism of Nathaniel, "Lord, come and see."

The very brief section of the narrative which we are now going to study together is full of suggestions of the *real humanity of Jesus*. And we come across one of them here. "Where have ye

laid him?" He said. "This question was remarkable," says Westcott, "as being the single place in the Gospel where the Lord speaks as seeking information." There are other places in the Gospel in which He is described as asking questions, but they were questions meant to prove the persons to whom they were addressed, rather than to add to His Own stock of information. But here, quite clearly, our Lord is asking for information. He asked, "Where have ye laid him?" for the simple reason that He did not know where in the cemetery Lazarus was buried.

I am not going now to discuss the limits of our Lord's knowledge. It is a particularly difficult subject, and none of the many explanations advanced are wholly satisfactory. There are evidences in the Gospels that our Lord had (at any rate on occasions) a range of knowledge that did not belong to ordinary men, but there are other evidences which show that in certain things our Lord's knowledge was limited as is the knowledge of ordinary men. We had, perhaps, better accept the facts just as they stand, without attempting exactly to dovetail them into one another. It is clear that on certain sides our Lord's knowledge was limited. He did not know times or seasons. He did not know where Lazarus was buried. He shared the common ideas of His day as to science and literature. To be able to say this brings with it a certain relief when we come to discuss critical questions. And

we can say it without in the least detracting from our Lord's real Divinity. Divinity to become incarnate had to limit itself. And omniscience was one of the Divine attributes of which Jesus emptied Himself. But He remains no less Divine. For His Divinity roots and grounds itself, not in any supernatural powers He possessed, but rather in His sinless character and His perfect and unbroken communication with God.

And while to recognise that there were limits to His knowledge in no wise detracts from His true Divinity, it certainly does emphasise the reality of His humanity, and the one truth is as vital to us as the other. The Greeks had a legend that Athene, the Goddess of Wisdom, sprang full-armed and intellectually complete from the brain of Zeus. That placed Athene clean outside the categories of humanity. But Jesus was born a child. He grew, He learned, He increased His knowledge by asking questions. He passed through exactly the same processes of acquiring knowledge as we pass through still. He was true and perfect Man.

"Where have ye laid him?" He said. And they replied, "Lord, come and see." And then John inserts that little verse, which all the children know as the shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept." It is a short verse, but it is a big statement. It is a short verse, but it carries with it mighty meanings and inferences, and to the meanings and implica-

tions of this shortest of verses I mean to devote the rest of my sermon.

But before I address myself to the teaching of this little verse, I want to call your attention to the exact word which the Evangelist uses to describe our Lord's emotion, because I think a true understanding of the word used will certainly affect our interpretation of the emotion. The point I really want you to notice is this, that the word which the Evangelist uses for the weeping of Jesus is not the same word as he used for the weeping of Mary and the Jews in verse 33. The verb he used to describe the weeping of Mary is the word *κλαίω*, the verb he uses to describe the weeping of Jesus is the verb *δακρύω*. Now, the difference between the two verbs is something like this: *κλαίω* suggests loud and convulsive lamentation, sobbing, and wailing; *δακρύω* suggests the silent shedding of tears. Mary *wailed*. But of Jesus, the Evangelist only says that *tears fell from Him*. The weeping of Jesus, Godet says, is the expression of a calm and gentle sorrow.

There is a passage in the Gospel in which the word *κλαίω* is applied to Jesus. "When He beheld the city, He wept over it." It was a vehement emotion He displayed on that occasion. He sobbed aloud over Jerusalem. But He only "shed tears" at the grave of Lazarus. Now, I think there is a point to be noticed here. What made Him sob and wail over Jerusalem was its obduracy and its sin.

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What brought the tears to His eyes at Bethany was His sympathy with Mary. From which I gather this, that sorrow and loss are not half so terrible in the eyes of Christ as sin. His eyes fill with tears in sympathy with the sufferer, but He "wails" over the sinner. Now let us turn to the little verse itself and examine it, if we may without irreverence, to see what are its meanings and implications.

### THE HUMANITY OF JESUS

"Jesus wept." And first of all, before I begin to ask why He wept, or what it was He wept over, let me pause again to say that this little phrase shows us the human Jesus. One of the German critics argues that this phrase shows the story to be unhistorical, because why should Jesus weep when He knew exactly what He was about to do. Well, all that only shows how the wise and prudent may miss things that are revealed to babes. If Jesus had been Deity sole and unmixed, with nothing human about Him but His appearance, He might have moved calm, unruffled, triumphant, through all this scene of grief and sorrow. "But the Word became *flesh*." He took hold of human nature on the side of its very weakness. He sat where we sat. He was touched with the feeling of all our infirmities. And so He was pierced to the quick by the sorrow of His friends, and the tears coursed down His cheeks in silent sympathy. Christ was no cold, impassive Being, of a race other than



our own, and therefore untouched by our troubles. He had this human heart of ours, these human feelings of ours, and therefore He wept with the weeping Mary. He was a real man.

"It is not with a heart of stone that the dead are raised," says a German scholar of a different sort; and Godet, commenting on that sentence, says that he who would help the unhappy must first of all surrender his heart to feeling that very suffering from which he desires to deliver them. And all that is profoundly true. A man must *feel* sorrow before he can do anything to remove it. No man can truly help men and women in their griefs and troubles and sins who does not share their lot. That is why Jesus became a man. I do not think He could have saved us from heaven, so to speak. The price of Saviourhood was manhood. To deliver us He had to become one of us. And this little phrase is wonderfully suggestive of the reality of His manhood: "Jesus wept." The tears came into His eyes at the sight of sorrow as they might into yours and mine.

And it suggests too that none of Christ's mighty works were done without cost. Every deed of mercy (if you will pardon the phrase) "took it out of Him." "Virtue went forth from Him," one of the Evangelists says, when describing a certain mighty deed which He performed. Virtue was always going forth from Him. Every gracious deed He ever did had its price. It made demands

upon His sensitive soul. It drained Him of spiritual force. And in that, too, He was true man. Sympathy is a costly thing. For it is only a sympathy into which you have put your very self that avails anything by way of comfort. And all sympathy into which you put yourself leaves you with so much less of yourself, leaves you spent and exhausted and drained. If I may give my own experience for what it is worth, I come home, after a round of visits to the sick and the sorrowing, oftentimes quite limp and utterly tired. Sympathy makes far bigger demands on the vital energies than any amount of physical labour. True sympathy is a costly thing; if it does not cost us anything, it profits the person we seek to comfort nothing. Jesus knew the cost of sympathy, "Jesus wept."

The little phrase thus sheds light upon the reality of Christ's human nature, and it is worth noticing, as the commentators point out, that it is in this "spiritual Gospel" which so emphasises His Divine glory that you get these vivid touches which place Him side by side with us in the fulness of His true humanity.

But now the question confronts us, Why did Jesus weep? What was the reason for these tears? I think there were more reasons than one.

## THE SYMPATHY OF JESUS

First of all (I have already incidentally referred to it), I think Jesus wept out of *pure sympathy*. He felt for the weeping Mary even though He knew that in a short time He was about to summon Lazarus back from the tomb. What does that word "sympathy" exactly mean? It means "suffering with." "Compassion" and "sympathy," though in our English use of them they have come to possess slightly different connotations, primarily and originally mean exactly the same thing. *Sympathy* is the Greek word, *compassion* is the Latin word, but both mean *suffering with*. That is what sympathy really means—"suffering with." And we do not begin to sympathise till we feel the sufferings of others as if they were our own. Now, that is exactly what Jesus did. "In all their afflictions He was afflicted." He shared men's sorrows and griefs. He felt them. He bore them on His Own heart. He shared Mary's sorrow even though He knew it was unnecessary. It touched Him to see her weeping and sobbing at His feet, and in sheer "suffering with" her "Jesus wept."

"Now, this little phrase, bringing with it, as it does, the assurance of our Lord's sympathy, is of infinite comfort to the mourner. Griefs are soothed and sorrows are lightened by the assurance that the Lord knows and cares and *feels*. We can bear our own losses and griefs the better because we

know that He really shares them with us. Our fears cease to be bitter when we realise that Jesus mingles His tears with ours. There is a line in one of our hymns which runs like this: "Alas for grief, but for those tears, once shed in Bethany." Yes, indeed, it would have been "Alas for grief!" Grief would have been intolerable, crushing, heart-breaking, did we not know that there was sympathy in the very heart of God, that He was feeling the grief along with us. It is that which has kept us sane and made us brave and patient in the midst of the welter of loss and grief of War's tragic years. Jesus weeps with this weeping earth. He weeps with every weeping mother and wife. Yes, we may comfort our hearts with the assurance that Jesus feels it all. If God did not care, the burden would be intolerable. But in all our afflictions He is afflicted. "Jesus wept."

It is amazing what comforting power there is in a real sympathy. I do not know that words are necessary. A grasp of the hand will do just as well. Job's friends just sat with him for seven days without saying a single word, and it did the patriarch's heart good. But no sympathy so comforts and sustains and cheers as the sympathy of Christ. He comes near to us in the dark hour and clasps our hands and says, "I know. I feel." And as He whispers His sympathy to us, the heart grows strong, for what is the sympathy of Christ but the sympathy of God, the assurance that at the

very heart of things there is an infinite love? And what does that mean but that somehow "all's well," even though things seem all wrong to us! That is the true balm for broken hearts, there is sympathy in the very heart of God. It is implied in this statement, "Jesus wept."

Some commentators think, further, that Jesus wept over the sense of frailty and brevity of human life. I am not at all sure about this. It is perfectly true that the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, is full of this sense of the brevity and frailty of life. There is a great sense of the "tears of things" in the speech about death of the saints and seers of the Old Testament. And it is equally true that this tragic sense of the frailty of mortality forms the undertone of a vast amount of modern literature. But I do not think that that view of life and death was at all characteristic of Christ. I do not think He was haunted or oppressed by this sense of swiftly coming death, for the simple reason that for Him "mortality was swallowed up of life." Look at those great words which He spoke to Martha, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." So I dismiss the suggestion that He wept over the frailty and uncertainty of life.

But there was more than sympathy in these tears. Because, in view of what was going to happen, they were astonishing tears. It was not at all surprising that Martha and Mary should weep for their

brother, and that the Jewish mourners should weep for the friend who, they thought, had been finally taken from their earthly fellowship; but why should Jesus weep, seeing that He knew what He was about to do? Well, the answer is this, *that it was just because He knew what He was about to do that He wept.*

#### THE EARTHLY AND THE HEAVENLY

The German critic I referred to just now argues that the story is unhistorical, because he does not admit that it was possible for Jesus to weep for a friend so soon to be restored. But it was just because He was about to restore him that Jesus wept. That was the very reason for His tears. These were not simply tears of sympathy with Mary and her grief; they were tears of regret for Lazarus, regret that he was to be summoned back again to the conflicts and trials and struggles of earth. Dr. David Smith quotes an old Greek Father to this effect: "He was about to raise him for His Own glory" (that was the Father's Will). But He wept for him, almost saying, "One that has sailed within the haven, I am calling back to the billows; one that has been already crowned, I am bringing back to the contests." You see, our Lord knew as no one else did or could the blessedness and glory of the life beyond the grave. The Jews imagined that at death men and women passed into silence and unconsciousness. And so they wailed and sobbed

when a friend died. They thought of him as excluded from the light of God's countenance, and really not alive at all. But Jesus knew that just beyond the gates of death lay the Father's house: that life and larger life was the lot of those who had passed beyond the veil.

And so He did not weep because Lazarus had been taken away from the light and joy of this world; He wept because, though His friend had gone to where "beyond these voices there is peace," He was obliged to call him back from that blessed land and from that glorious life, back to the conflicts and labours and sorrows of earth. It was like calling a pilgrim who had reached the land flowing with milk and honey back into the weary wilderness. It had to be done, not simply for the comfort of the sisters, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. It was essential that the glory of the Son should be displayed in unmistakable fashion before the eyes of the Jews of Jerusalem, so as to make one final and convincing appeal to them, and so leave them, if they rejected Him, absolutely without excuse. But for Lazarus's sake Christ was sorry. He shed tears at the necessity of having to call him back. For he came back from a land in which there is no sorrow or sighing or pain or sin or death, back to a world where all these things had again to be faced. What wonder that He shed tears?

If St. Paul, as Dr. David Smith says, had the

desire to depart and be with Christ, because it was far better, what marvel that Jesus, Who knew the felicity of Heaven, should grieve to bring Lazarus back to the strife and sorrow of this earthly state? Remembering the gladness of His Father's house, where He had dwelt from everlasting, and whence He had come on His errand of redemption, He knew it was no disaster, but an exceeding gain, to fall on sleep and wake in that home of bliss and inherit the glory which God hath prepared for them that love Him. Christ was sorry for Lazarus. If the sisters had only known, they would never have wished him back, for he was infinitely better off on the other side. And these tears of our Lord say in effect to every mourner, "If you only knew, as I know, what lies within the veil; if you only knew, as I know, the bliss beyond compare of that world of peace and joy and the beatified vision, you would not weep for your lost, you would not wish them back, you would rejoice for them with joy unspeakable and full of glory, because they are at home with the Lord."

And so, enshrined in this little phrase, "Jesus wept," there is a hint—nay, more than a hint, an assurance—that in that land to which we are all of us journeying there awaits us, in Christ, a bliss which is absolutely without compare. Scripture does not tell us much about the life to come. It is only hints, gleams, suggestions of its glory that we get. But we get enough to know that to die



is gain. We weep at the wrong places. Like Mary, we weep and wail at the grave as if all were lost. Of course, it is natural, it is inevitable that we should weep for the lost human companions. But the weeping should not be bitter or rebellious, and mingled with it there should be a holy joy. Jesus did not weep when He knew that Lazarus was dead; He only wept when He was going to bring him back to earth. For though probably Lazarus's lot was in many respects an enviable one—for he had all the world could give to make him happy, and he was rich in the love of his sisters—nevertheless the happiness of the home at Bethany was not to be compared with the pleasures at God's right hand. Jesus shed tears that Lazarus, after a brief experience of it, had to give it all up and come back. The next life is richer than this. The Father's house is better than any earthly house, however fair, in which we may happen to dwell. Jesus wept to bring Lazarus back, for eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

## XI

### JESUS AND THE JEWS

"The Jews therefore said, Behold how He loved him."

JOHN xi. 36, 37.

I SAID, when beginning my exposition of this chapter, that the significance of the raising of Lazarus, so far as our Lord's history was concerned, was that it brought to a head and a climax the hostility of the Jerusalem Jews. This great miracle led directly to the Cross. Had Jesus not performed it, it is possible that His life might have been prolonged. But the excitement caused by this stupendous miracle was such that the chief priests and elders determined to take immediate action. They were afraid the people might take sides with Jesus and recognise His Messianic claim, so to stop developments they resolved to put Christ to death. The marvel is that they were able to do it in face of the fact of this miracle. The marvel is that chief priests and elders and scribes and all the leaders of the people did not come and fall at Christ's feet and salute Him, as Nathaniel did, "Rabbi, Thou art Son of God, Thou art King of Israel." For this miracle, as I have said more than once in the

course of my exposition, was meant to be a sort of last appeal to the Jerusalem people. The miracle of the healing of the blind man had left them obdurate, angry, unconvinced. With the healed man before them, they blindly persisted in calling Christ a "Sinner." But Christ was not willing to cast them off without giving them one more chance. So in the sight of many of them who had come out to weep with the sisters, with a certain publicity that was rather unusual, He raised Lazarus from the dead. It was a kind of appeal that left the Jews absolutely without excuse if they rejected Him.

Now, one would have thought that such a miracle could have but one effect. One would have thought it would have created the feeling of wonder and worship in the beholders, and that it would convince the most sceptical that the doer of the deed was Divine. But that was not the effect it had at all. What it did was to divide the watching Jews. It split them up into two camps. It brought some to conviction and faith; it inflamed others to an intense and more deadly hate.

You may ask why I make these remarks at this particular point. They would seem to be more in place when I come to consider the effect of the miracle on the beholders as John sets it forth in verses 45, 46. Well, I refer to it here simply because we get at this point a warning of what was to follow later. The division among the Jews, which became so apparent after the miracle, was really in existence

before the miracle was performed. It is here in these two verses. The sight of Jesus' emotion stirred some of the Jews to sympathy with Him and admiration for Him; it became for others of them simply an occasion for a taunt and a sneer. "Behold, how He loved him!" said some of them. But others wanted to know why, if He could heal the blind, He had not intervened to save His friend from dying. It was a sneer at Christ's emotion, and it was an insinuation of disbelief in His power. There is something almost tragic in the wanton, cold-blooded, obstinate prejudice of these unbelieving Jews. It made them incapable of judging fairly or even rationally. Their judgment was so warped and distorted by these prejudices of theirs that they called white black, and good evil, and placed wicked interpretations upon some of Christ's most gracious and loving deeds.

He showed, for instance, a happy geniality in His dealings with men. He became their friend, He shared in their household joys. And on the strength of it His jaundiced critics called him a glutton and a drunkard. He cast out devils out of many a poor, tortured creature; He restored insane people to self-possession and a quiet mind. And the comment of these bitter-hearted people was that He was able to do it just because He was in collusion with the devil himself. He healed the man who was blind from his birth, and they had nothing better to say about Him than that He was a Sinner

because He had done the deed on a Sabbath day. And now He weeps in sympathy with Mary, and these people's criticism amounts to this, that His tears are a confession of powerlessness, and they suggest a doubt as to the reality of His healing of the blind man. You would have thought that this simple display of human affection would have touched them, and made them feel more kindly towards Jesus as a man; instead of that it added to the bitterness of their hate. You might say of them, as the Scripture says of Pharaoh of old, that after beholding signs of our Lord's grace and power they simply "hardened their hearts."

What a comment it all is upon the blinding power of Prejudice! It distorts the vision and perverts the judgment. It does so on the levels of our ordinary everyday life. Perhaps nothing breeds prejudice like party passion. The partisan is incapable of sane judgment. He looks through the spectacles of his prejudice, and he reads evil meanings into every action of an opponent. He cannot give him credit for truth or honour or patriotism. We were supposed to have got rid of this party spirit during the years of war. But prejudice and passion are again in full tongue. I confess I get disturbed and frightened for my country when I notice the personal vendettas waged in our Press; when I notice the attempts made to create prejudice against this man or that, to suggest that this person is the one and only person who has the interests of

England at heart, while certain others are neither more nor less than traitors in disguise. I confess I get disturbed and frightened when I hear the venomous speech in which some slanderous tongues indulge against our public men. In the frenzy of their partisanship they deny the existence of any good in them, and attribute to them every vile and unholy quality. Party spirit and the prejudice born of it may shatter our national unity, and once our unity is shattered there lies before us nothing but collapse and shame.

All this may seem to have but little connexion with the exposition in which I am engaged, yet suffer me to say this word, because I think it is an urgently needed word: If we want to help our country, let us divest ourselves of *prejudice*. Of course we have our preferences, and those perhaps we have a right to keep. But *prejudice* is a public menace. Let us refrain from sweeping judgments. Let us shun slander as we would the plague. Let us believe the very best of our public men. They may not be of our way of thinking, but it is only vulgar and wicked prejudice that speaks of them as knaves and traitors. I believe every one of our public men is honestly and wholeheartedly doing his very best for the country. So long as they carry the country's responsibilities, they have a right to fair and just treatment, to our confidence and trust. The kind of spirit which these Jews showed, which reads mean and despicable motives

into a man's best deeds, may dig England's grave unless we check it. Prejudice and party spirit are a menace and a peril.

But, of course, never did prejudice and party spirit carry men to such lengths of slander and murderous hate as they did in the case of Jesus. The unbelieving Jews simply refused to see any good in Jesus. He was not the Messiah of their expectations, therefore they refused to believe He was the Messiah at all. Prejudice is deaf, says John Bunyan. It is more than deaf, it is blind. There never walked this earth a Person so kind, so gracious, so beneficent, so absolutely pure, as Jesus. He went about doing good. Every village, every home, was the happier for His presence. He brought hope and sunshine into innumerable lives. He was the fairest among ten thousand and the altogether lovely. And yet these prejudiced Jews saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. They called Him a malefactor, a blasphemer, a devil. And so inveterate was their prejudice, and in such malignant hate did it issue, that at last they crucified Him to the tree.

And prejudice does its ugly work still. I believe that is what is keeping multitudes away from Jesus. I cannot account for the opposition of men to Jesus except on the score of prejudice. Why is it that men should take the trouble to argue against Him week by week in the parks? Why should they be apparently so exceedingly mad against Him? It is

to the normal person inconceivable that any sane man should hate One who did nothing but good in His life-time, and Whose influence has been the mightiest force for good ever since. How do you account for it? It is the wicked work of prejudice. These men have never fairly looked at Christ. They have got the notion that somehow He interferes with the joys of life, or that His teaching does not accord with the findings of Science, or that His religion tells in favour of the rich and against the interests of the poor. These prejudices have been instilled into their minds perhaps from infancy. They have never seen the real Jesus, the Friend and Lover of men, or poor men and outcast men and sinful men, Jesus the Health-giver, Jesus the Joy-bringer. They have never seen Him. They are blinded by prejudice, and so Jesus is still the despised and rejected of men. When any man looks at Christ with clear and candid eye, it is not long before he falls at His feet and worships Him.

I have been led to say more about this matter of prejudice than I meant to have said when I started my sermon. Now let me turn to consider the actual comments made by the two parties of the Jewish spectators. And as it is prejudice I have been speaking of, let me alter the order and take first that comment in which black and bitter prejudice reveals itself.



## THE TAUNT

Some of them said, "Could not this Man, which opened the eyes of him that was born blind, have caused that this man also should not die?" Will you notice the difference in the Revised Version. The Authorised Version puts it—"Could not this Man Who opened the eyes of the blind." The Revised Version reads—"which opened the eyes of him that was born blind," and makes it clear that the reference is to that specific miracle which had set Jerusalem in a ferment and which had caused Jesus to flee for His life. Some critics find it strange that these Jews did not refer to the raising of the dead by Jesus in Galilee rather than to the healing of the blind man. But to begin with, they were not thinking of the possibility of raising Lazarus from the dead. And, as Dr. McClymont says, any references to such miracles in Galilee would have been out of place in Jerusalem, even if they had been aware of their occurrence. It was only the question of the power of Jesus to *heal* Lazarus that was in their minds; and what more natural than that they should refer to that apparent miracle which had been the subject of so much and so recent talk in Jerusalem? But leaving little details of that sort, what are we to make of the remark itself? Some commentators think that the words were spoken in a sort of honest ignorance. If Jesus loved Lazarus as much as His tears seemed

to indicate, and if He really had miraculous power such as had been shown in the healing of the blind man, why had He not interfered to heal Lazarus? These Jews, according to this view, were just puzzled and bewildered. Just as people have said in recent days in a similar puzzlement and bewilderment, "If God is all-powerful, and if He is Love, why does He not interfere to stop the war?"

But I think the trend of the narrative is all against this favourable interpretation. I do not think there can be a shadow of doubt that the remark is meant to convey a taunt and a sneer. The words are spoken in irony, as Bishop Westcott says. "They fancy," says Dr. McClymont, "that they can see an inconsistency between His apparent grief and His claim of the exercise of superhuman power." "This was the Man," says Dr. David Smith, "Who had passed for a miracle-worker, and only the other week had created such a stir in Jerusalem by pretending to have opened a blind man's eyes, and here He was shedding unavailing and impotent tears." The tears, according to them, showed Him to be powerless. If He really could perform miracles, He would surely have performed one in this case of Lazarus, where there was a deep personal love to urge Him to it. So they practically taunt Christ with being a mere trickster, a deceiver, an impostor. What they see in the tears of Jesus is not proof of His kindly human sympathy, but evidence of His helplessness. They could not con-

ceive of love deliberately letting the sickness take its course, because it had something better than healing in view.

And do you not think a great many people are in that same mental position still?—as they have contemplated the recent world tragedy, for instance? The war has shattered the faith of some. It has seemed to challenge either the *power* or the *love* of God, or both. It has seemed to give the lie to the Christian teaching that a loving God is really on the Throne. If God is King, and if He is Love, why has He just looked on while the war was filling the world with sorrow, shattering the happiness of homes and breaking innumerable hearts? I am not going into the answer to all this at the moment. There is an answer and a sufficient one. There is a sense in which it is true to say that God had not the power to stop the war and put an end to the suffering. For the world He made is not a world of automata, but of free personal beings. But passing that by, I want you to notice what is the real root of the difficulty—people find it difficult to believe that *love can inflict or tolerate pain*.

The one statement in the New Testament which, on the whole, mankind finds it hardest to believe is this—"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." They concentrate attention on the chastisement, the suffering, the pain, they have no eyes for the greater blessing the chastisement is meant to bring; and seeing only the pain, they are prone to doubt

the love. That is the case with the world tragedy which has taken place before our eyes. People take no account of the better world that may issue from it, they never stay to think that only by terrible surgery of this kind could the Celestial Surgeon save life; they see the universal agony, and they challenge and deny Sovereign Love. That is the case oftentimes on the individual scale. People ask where is the love in the sorrow and suffering that come to individuals, forgetting that through sorrow and suffering men often enter into possession of a soul. They ask where is the love when death takes away a dear one, forgetting that love has a better thing in store for that dear one than a few more years of earthly life, even the vision of the Father's face, and a place in the Father's house from which he shall no more go out. True love does not always avert pain and suffering. It allows them, it sends them, because it knows they will work out an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. It was the short and narrow view that prompted this taunt. Christ had a greater thing in mind than the healing of Lazarus's sickness, even the creation of a new and exultant faith in the Resurrection and the Life in the hearts of the sisters and in the hearts of all succeeding generations of men. It was not because He was powerless, it was not because He lacked love, but because He loved so deeply and had such a rich gift to bestow, that He let Lazarus die.

## THE TRIBUTE

Now let us turn to the remark of the other group. "Behold," said the others of these Jews, touched by the sight of the tears coursing down our Lord's cheeks, "how He loved him!" The word translated *loved* here is the word which sets forth warm human affection, the love of a friend. They recognise that Jesus had this simple, human affection for Lazarus. The danger with a great man is that there should be a sort of aloofness about him, that he should be remote from the common run of men, and that their pains and sorrows should scarcely affect him. The Olympian lives in a serene world unaffected by the woes and miseries of ordinary people. I have often fancied that Goethe was a man of that type. He was an Olympian. And there was a certain coldness and insensibility and impassibility about him. But, though Jesus was the Son of the Eternal God, there was nothing cold or distant about Him. He admitted men and women into His friendship and into His heart. It was not simply that He allowed them to love Him, but He loved them. And so it came to pass that now He wept out of sheer sympathy and love. "See," they said, "how He loved him!" And it is not of Lazarus only that this could be said. It can be said of us all; at any rate, it can be said of all of us who enter into the relationship of friendship with Him. Jesus loves all His friends with a personal and individual

love. He has a warm affection for every single one of His people. The idea has become so familiar that it has lost its wonder for us. And yet when we try to realise it, there is a wonder in this personal love of Jesus that is quite beyond speech. Here is the mightiest marvel of the universe, "The Son of God loved me, and gave Himself up for me."

"Behold," they said, "how He loved him!" How dearly, how tenderly! is what they meant. And what was the evidence of this deep and tender love? Why, this—"Jesus wept." The evidence of the love was the tears. And the tears of Christ *are* evidence of His love. "When He beheld the city, He wept over it." Why did He weep over it? Because He loved it. If Jesus had not cared for Jerusalem, the sight of it would not have moved Him to tears. If He had not cared for it and passionately loved it, the thought of its fate would not have wellnigh broken His heart. It was because He loved it so well that the thought of all its sin and obduracy and impenitence melted Him into tears. And still He weeps over the sin of the city, and over the sin of the individual, over your sin and over mine. He weeps because He cares. A son plunges into wild and reckless ways, and in some quiet home a woman weeps. She weeps because he is her son and because she loves him. "Behold," you might say of her, crushed and broken with sorrow, "how she loves him!" And Christ weeps over

everyone who wanders into sin and folly and shame. And the tears are the proof of His love.

“Behold how He loved him!” they said, because Jesus wept. But others beside Jesus wept that day. Mary wept, and the Jews who had come with her wept. If I had only the tears of Jesus to go by, I might conclude that Mary and the friends from Jerusalem loved Lazarus as well and as warmly as He. But to know *how* Jesus loved, how deeply, how lavishly, how utterly, how sacrificially, I must see Him not only with the tears rolling down His cheeks as He went on the way to the Bethany cemetery; I must see Him sweating, as it were, great drops of blood in the Garden as He agonised beneath the load of sin; I must see Him bearing our curse for us and hanging on the accursed tree. It is in the Garden and on the cross that I learn *how* He loved Lazarus. He loved him to the uttermost. He loved him so well that He took his place and died his death. The agony and the Cross were all for Lazarus. Look at Him agonising and dying. It was all for Lazarus. And from that learn *how* He loved him.

It was all for Lazarus, but it was also all for you and me. That is the marvel of the Cross and Passion of our Lord. It was for everybody. It was the propitiation for the sins of the world. And yet it was all for every one of us, for each one of us. If there had been only one sinner in the world, and that sinner had been you or I, our Lord would have

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become incarnate, and would have suffered and died just for you and for me. We can, if we like, exclude everyone else from our purview and say, "Bethlehem was for me. The Garden was for me. The Cross was all for me." And it is in that measureless self-emptying we learn the depth of the love of Christ. I know *how* Christ loves you and me not when I see Him weep, but when I see Him die. This is the message of the bitter, tragic Cross, this is what it says to you and me, "Behold how He loved you!"



## XII

### JESUS AT THE GRAVE

"Jesus therefore, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the tomb."—JOHN xi. 38, 39, 40.

THE verse which immediately precedes records for us the sneer in which the unbelieving Jews indulged when they saw the tears coursing down the cheeks of Jesus. Those tears, instead of touching their hearts as being evidence of our Lord's human affection and His deep and unaffected sympathy for man, simply furnished them with occasion for a bitter and ugly taunt. They argued from those tears that Christ was powerless. And they insinuated that His healing of the man born blind was nothing but a deceit and a sham. They must have made these comments sufficiently audibly for them to reach the ears of the disciples, otherwise we should not have had them recorded here. And if they reached the ears of the disciples who formed His immediate entourage, we can quite easily see that they must also have reached the ears of Christ. What I mean to suggest is that it was not in virtue of His superhuman knowledge that our Lord knew what these unbelieving Jews were thinking and say-

ing. The muttered comments actually reached His ears. And this was the effect they had upon Him, "Jesus groaned in Himself." It is exactly the same word as that which we came across in verse 33, where it is said that in face of death and evil Jesus "groaned in spirit." The word, as I then said, carries with it the notion of anger and indignation. So that here, as in verse 33, it might be translated, "Jesus chafed with indignation in Himself." That was the effect that the bitter prejudice, which made tears of tender sympathy the occasion for a sneer, had upon Jesus—it made Him "indignant."

The "indignant" Jesus! In verse 33 He was indignant with sin and death, with impersonal evil, here He is indignant with *evil people*. This is an aspect of Christ upon which we have not been in the habit of saying very much. In fact, in our teaching and preaching and speaking about Jesus we have to a large extent ignored it. We have so emphasised the tenderness and gentleness of Jesus that people have almost come to persuade themselves that anger, holy resentment, have no place in His character. I believe it is this elimination of the idea of holy resentment from our conception of Christ's character that accounts for the prevalence of that unethical idea of forgiveness which would condone and palliate public wrong, and would forgive without pronouncing solemn judgment.

Now, we do two things when we ignore the quality of moral indignation in Christ. First, we

make a Christ for ourselves Who is not the New Testament Christ. No one can picture Christ as a soft, good-natured, sentimental Being, never flaming into holy wrath, never uttering stern judgment, who goes to the Bible for his picture of Christ. The rather effeminate Jesus of our modern view is not the historic Jesus. The historic Jesus could and did burst out into burning indignation. Read the story of the cleansing of the temple; read the story of His denunciation of Scribes and Pharisees; notice a little phrase like this which we are considering together just now, and you will know that Christ was no sentimental Person smiling foolishly and helplessly at sin, but a Holy Being Who was stirred by the sight of evil into sacred indignation and wrath. If we want to get at the real historical Jesus, we had better take our conception of Him, not from the rather weak and effeminate representations of Him given in modern books and modern paintings, we had better go back to the representation of Him given by the man who loved Him best, and therefore knew Him best. This is John's final summing up of his conception of Christ. He is a Person Whose eyes are as a flame of fire and out of Whose mouth there proceeds a sharp, two-edged sword.

The second thing I want to say is this, that when we eliminate indignation from our conception of Christ, we are not only untrue to the New Testament, but we also *sacrifice His moral perfection.*

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People slur over the fact of Christ's indignation or ignore and deny it altogether, because they imagine that it conflicts with His character as Love. But what they really do is not to safeguard love, but to make the very love immoral. Love, to be perfect love, must be *ethical*, it must be a holy love. It must carry in its heart the capacity for indignation. Love that never waxes indignant at wrong is not love at all, it is maudlin and unethetical good-nature, which is only a base counterfeit of love. Parents who condone and smile at wrong in their children, instead of rebuking and punishing it, do not thereby demonstrate their love, but rather their lack of it. And when we eliminate this quality of indignation from our conception of Christ, we demoralise His character. We destroy even His love by making it unethical. We sacrifice His perfection. To preserve our Lord's moral perfection, and to be true to the New Testament presentation of Him, we must lay more stress than we have done on His capacity for *moral indignation*. We must remember that His love is a *holy love*.

We get an example of His indignation here. As he listened to the taunts and sneers of these unbelieving Jews, He "chafed with indignation in Himself." Here He is indignant, not simply with evil as a principle and a power, but with *evil people*. Our Lord was "indignant," He was full of holy wrath against these people for their wilful and obdurate unbelief. Their bitter prejudice which made

them turn good into evil, and read wicked meanings into the most gracious and tender acts, stirred Him to a sacred and righteous resentment. "He chafed with indignation in His spirit." I read in another place and about other people that "He marvelled at their unbelief." Unbelief always strikes Him with wonder. But there are certain types of unbelief that move Him, not to wonder, but to indignation. The unbelief that closes its eyes to all evidence, that stands obdurate and impenitent even in face of the most subduing signs of the working of God's power, stirs Him to wrath. Such unbelief roots itself not in ignorance, but in an evil and prejudiced heart. With those who sin through ignorance, and who disbelieve because they have not had a fair chance of believing, our Lord will deal leniently enough; but for those who call good evil, and light darkness, He has only indignation and wrath. The French have a saying that "to know all is to forgive all." And the saying suits the easy, sentimental temper of an age like this. But that saying is as remote as the poles from the forgiving spirit as the New Testament understands it. "To know all is to forgive all" is the expression of a moral tolerance that amounts practically to moral indifferentism. It is to obliterate the fundamental difference between good and evil. It has nothing in common with the New Testament attitude. Just because He knows all, Christ will judge justly. But just because He knows all He is indignant with some who disbelieve, not

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through lack of evidence, but in spite of it, because they do not want to believe, because of their own evil, bitter, and prejudiced hearts.

“He chafed with indignation in Himself.” These men were shutting their eyes to the light. I wonder how He feels towards the people of England here. For if we disbelieve, it is not because we have not had our chance of believing. It is not because we have not had evidence of Christ’s Divine power. If we in England disbelieve, it is because we do not want to believe and will not believe. It is because we love evil rather than the good. It is because of our evil and black and prejudiced hearts. And it is well for us to remember that against all such bitter and prejudiced unbelief our Lord still “chafes with indignation in Himself.” It stirs Him to sacred and holy wrath, and the “wrath of the Lamb” is a terrible thing.

Our Lord, however, put a curb on His feelings. He speedily checked this indignation of His. He was all eagerness to bring comfort to the hearts of the sorrowing sisters, and to do the work given Him of God to do. He put these Jews and their bitter prejudices out of His mind, for by this time He had been brought to the tomb. The Evangelist tells us that the tomb in Lazarus’s case was a cave. Such caves were quite common burying-places amongst the Jews. It was in a grave hewn out of the rock that Jesus Himself at last was laid. The cave may have been vertical or horizontal. All

the hints we get here suggest that this particular cave was an horizontal cave. Against the opening of the grave a stone was placed. Sometimes these stones worked along a kind of groove or ledge, and slid or were rolled into the necessary position. Jesus, as soon as He had come to the graveside, said to some of the bystanders, "Take ye away the stone."

### MAN'S CO-OPERATION

Upon which command of Christ's, Dr. McClymont makes this comment: "He will only call His superhuman power into exercise when it becomes indispensable." No one can read the account of Christ's miracles without noticing that He exercised a certain reserve in the use of His power. It was not simply that He did not perform miracles indiscriminately and at random as a mere wonder-worker would have done. But He never did anything at all by the exercise of His Divine power which could be accomplished by human and everyday means.

I suppose it would have been easy for Christ to have fed the five thousand people out in the wilderness with bread entirely of His own providing. He could, if He wished, have *created* the bread and the fish with which He fed them. But that was never Christ's way. What man could do, He always allowed him to do and expected him to do. And so He made the five loaves and the two small fishes

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which the disciples had been able to procure the basis of that wonderful meal. Seeing that He was about to accomplish the mighty miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, it could only have been a simple thing for Him to have ordered the stone to move of its own accord. But while He alone could raise the dead, the men standing by could take away the stone, and what man could do Jesus never did for him, but always expected him to do. And all this is just an index to Christ's method. He always expected and still expects man to co-operate with Him. He does not exercise His Divine power to do work instead of us. He expects us to contribute our share and to do what it is in our power to do. It is God alone Who can give the increase, but He expects Paul to do the planting and Apollos the watering. It is only the Spirit of God that can regenerate the soul, but He expects us to do the work of preaching the Word of Life. And the work is bound to lag if we fail to do our part. The real reason of the stagnation of these times is not that the power of Christ has failed or even lessened: the reason is that *we* do not perform our part. And what that part is is admirably suggested by this little phrase, "Take ye away the stone."

We cannot ourselves raise to life those who are dead in trespasses and sins. But we can "take away the stones" which prevent the life-giving voice of Christ from reaching them.

We can take away the stone of *ignorance*, for



example. There are millions and millions of our fellow-creatures who are dead in trespasses and sins for the simple reason that they have never had the chance of hearing the voice of Jesus. Think of those dim millions of China and India and Africa and the Southern Seas. They are pitifully and tragically dead, and only Christ can quicken them into life. But how are they to know of Christ if no one goes forth to tell them of Him? How shall they hear, as Paul says, without a preacher? The preacher cannot himself convert the heathen. He can only make it possible for the voice of Christ to reach them. And that is the command Christ issues to us so far as the heathen are concerned. He does not ask us to convert and save them. He alone can do that. What He bids us do is to take away the stone of ignorance which prevents His voice from reaching them.

We can take away the stone of *misconception*. There are multitudes at home here who have been frightened away from the Christian faith by the selfish living of Christians. Judging the Master from His followers, they see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. I am quite sure that a great many are outside the Church and outside the love of Christ simply because Christian people have given such false representations of the Christian life. And so they do not come to Christ that they might have life. Now, we can remove this stone. We can so live as to remove men's prejudices against

Christianity and their misconception of it, and make them willing at least to listen to Jesus. It is Christ Who alone can quicken them into newness of life. But we can "take away the stone," and so make it possible for His voice to reach them.

That is our business, to take away all the stones that prevent men from hearing the voice of Christ. That is our part in the salvation of men. We have to make straight the way of the Lord. We have to remove the obstacles out of His path. The saving power is always of Him, and not of us. But our humbler part is no less essential. And if we fail to take away the stone, Lazarus may continue to rot in his grave. Are we doing this? It seems to me we are doing one of two things. We are either making it easier or making it harder for Christ to do His work. We are either "taking away the stone," or else we are "putting a stumbling-block in our brother's way."

#### MARTHA'S INTERVENTION

"Take ye away the stone," said Jesus. But before the bystanders could obey the command, Martha intervened with her word of protest. "Lord," she said, "by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." Martha, "the sister of him that was dead," is how John describes her. "The relationship is mentioned," says Westcott, "in order to place in a clear light the tender solicitude with which Martha shrank from disclosing the ravages of

death on one nearly bound to her." She thought, of course, that the only motive that was animating Christ was a desire to have a last look at His friend. She had no expectation of the mighty deed which was about to take place. And she did not want Jesus to see the disfigurement death had already wrought in the beloved and familiar face. Respect both for the dead and for Jesus combined to prompt her to this protest. "For," she said, "he hath been dead four days." There had been time for corruption to do its ruinous work. Probably each day Martha had been to the grave. Perhaps she may have cherished some hope that soul and body had not finally parted company. For the Jews had a belief that for three days the spirit hovered about the sepulchre, expecting that it might by some chance be able to return to the body. But when on the fourth day the fashion of the countenance began to change, the spirit finally retired and abandoned the body. Well, on that fourth day Martha had seen signs of that dread change, and she knew that all hope was over.

Now, it is evident from this remark that Martha did not expect anything to happen. She had reconciled herself to her loss. She did not look for Lazarus to return. What are we to make of this? I think the succeeding verse seems to suggest a kind of gentle reproach on the part of Christ. Are we to put down this remark to unbelief? No, I am quite sure we are not to do that. There may

be in it some suggestion of failure to understand Christ's meaning and intention. There may be in Christ's words a hint of reproach that she had not gathered some idea of His loving purpose. But there is no unbelief here. On the contrary, I should be disposed to quote this saying as proof of the triumph of Martha's faith. Up to that time she had longed fiercely and passionately that Lazarus might come back. She had been angry with death and the grave. She had thought of her brother's life as being cut short and quenched. Death stood to her for sheer disaster and loss.

But the speech she had held with Christ had changed her point of view, and transfigured her conception of death. Christ had given her a new and radiant faith. Those great words, "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die," had given her the assurance that the light of her brother's life was not quenched, that he was alive still, more gloriously alive than ever, alive unto God. And so she had ceased to wish to have Lazarus back again. She was content that his body should lie in the grave. She knew, she had her Lord's word for it, that he was in a better home than that of Bethany, and enjoying a more blessed life than that which he had enjoyed while still with them. It was the triumph of the faith born of our Lord's great and glorious words. And I think that is the true attitude of faith. We cannot help feeling the loss. Our own lives are desolate and lonely,

and the heart cries out oftentimes for the beloved companionship. And yet, with all our grief, we do not wish them back. It would be selfish to wish them back. For they have passed into God's Presence, where alone there is fulness of joy, and to His right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.

### JESUS' ASSURANCE

There was victorious faith in Martha's protest, and yet there was lack of perception in it as well, and so Jesus' reply has a suggestion of gentle reproach in it. "Said I not unto thee," He said, "if thou believedst, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" Now, we have no record of any such thing having been said to Martha in those precise words. Some of the commentators think that the substance of this remark was conveyed in the conversation recorded in verses 25 and 26. Godet, on the other hand, thinks the reference is to what Christ said when the message about Lazarus's sickness reached Him. The remark Christ made when the news was brought to Him was this, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." Godet thinks the messenger heard this remark, and no doubt reported it to the sisters on his return to Bethany, and he thinks the words "not unto death, but for the glory of God," ought to have created some great expectation in the hearts of the sisters. Godet's sugges-

tion strikes me as the most likely, though, of course, we must always remember that the conversations recorded for us are not verbatim reports of all that was said; and it is quite possible that in the course of His conversation with Martha Christ may have said these very words. Anyhow, the hint had been lost upon Martha—just as the many hints about His Own resurrection were lost upon the disciples. Death so filled Martha's mind that the idea of resurrection found no entrance.

"If thou *believedst*, thou shouldst *see*." That is always the order. Thomas said, "Except I see, I will not believe." And this age of ours is very like him in the stress it lays on *sight*. "Seeing," we say, "is believing." But the true order is just the opposite. We do not *see* in order to *believe*, we *believe* in order to *see*! The scientific explorer *believes* that a certain thing is true. He experiments and experiments. It is all trust to begin with, but by believing he comes to see. We believe in God first, then we come to see Him. We believe He is there, we take Him on trust, we lean on Him, and He responds to our faith and we know He *is*. We must *believe* that we may *see*. "If thou *believedst*, thou shouldst see the glory of God."

And in what was the glory of God to be revealed to Martha? In this tremendous fact that the brother whom she called dead was *still in the keeping of God, and that the God Who kept him*

*could at His will restore him.* That was the glory of God that was to be revealed to Martha, that *God, and not death, was Lord*; that He had the keys of death and Hades, that He rescued His saints from the power of the grave and cherished them in His safe keeping. This was to be shown to her by the actual raising of Lazarus from the dead. And this is still the great *glory of God!* There are many aspects of God's glory. He is glorious in His Own holiness and perfection; He is glorious in His mercy and redeeming love. But all the other aspects of His glory would go for nothing, if He were not supreme over death, if He were not able to rescue men from the power of the grave. His very love and mercy would be vain and impotent if at last death could snatch His loved ones from His arms. What is the glory of God at this present time of universal sorrow? His Lordship over death, the assurance we have that neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. If God could not do that, if death left Him baffled and beaten, He would be no God for us at such a time as this. But the glory of God is just this, He redeems men from the power of the grave. He takes death and captivity captive. He rifles every grave and empties it. He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all live unto Him. And one day, if we believe, we shall see. For one day, after some brief momentary closing of the eyes, we shall open them to

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find ourselves in the Father's house, surrounded by those whom we had loved but lost, in the enjoyment of perfect blessedness and eternal life. "If thou believest, thou shalt see the glory of God."



### XIII

## THE PRAYER OF JESUS

"So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest me."—JOHN xi. 41, 42.

"So they took away the stone." Martha made no further protest. The bystanders to whom Christ had given the command no longer hesitated or delayed. Perhaps they did not know exactly what Christ was about to do; but what He had said to Martha about "seeing the glory of God" had convinced them that it was not for the mere sake of getting a last glimpse of His dead friend's face that our Lord had said, "Take ye away the stone," but that He had some great and solemn object in view. "So they took away the stone"; and I believe that a great awe fell upon the souls of those who stood by as they waited with tense expectation to see what Jesus was about to do. And what did He do? He lifted up His eyes and began to pray.

"He lifted up His eyes." Godet says that to man the visible heaven is the most eloquent witness of the invisible power of God. He agrees with the Psalmist that, as nothing else in nature, the *heavens*

declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork. The two things that used to fill the soul of the great philosopher Kant with awe were the moral law within and the starry heavens without. Kepler, the great astronomer, when tracing the orbits of the planets, felt that he was "thinking God's thoughts after Him." God has written His Name across the skies. And so truly was Jesus man, adds Godet, the Word made flesh, that it was by gazing upon that infinite expanse that He sought His Father's face and prepared Himself for inward communion with Him.

Now, I do not doubt the truth of all that. There is something that impels adoration and worship about the sight of the starry heavens. But it strikes me as being quite unnecessarily subtle as an explanation of this simple act of Christ's. It is an instinct with us to look up as we pray. It may be nothing more than a childish superstition to think of God as living in some heaven "above the bright blue sky." But it is no superstition at all that makes us think that all good things are *above* us. We are always seeking the things which are above. And God is above us most of all. We *ascend* to the hill of the Lord. When the prophet got his vision of God, He was high and lifted up. It is the most natural thing in the world, therefore, to *look up* when we pray. It is an instinct with us. And what Jesus did at the graveside was just to adopt the natural and instinctive attitude of

prayer. He did it partly, I believe, for the sake of those who stood by. They were waiting, hushed and awestruck, to see what He would do next. And they saw Him take the familiar attitude of prayer. And so they were prepared for those words of prayer which straightway fell upon their ears.

### JESUS AT PRAYER

I invite you for a moment or two to think of *Jesus praying*. The sight of Jesus praying opens up for us glimpses into a great deep where all our thoughts are drowned. There are things about Him, says Dr. Stalker, and there are statements of His Own, to which justice cannot be done without categorically calling Him God. But there are other facts about Him which compel us, in the fullest acceptance of the term, to call Him a man. And His need of prayer and His constant use of prayer are one of these. When He became a man, He emptied Himself. He laid aside the wealth of His Divine glory and became poor. And He became "poor," not simply by being born the child of humble parents and living a life of toil, He became poor by the very fact of becoming a man. For humanity itself is poor. It is a weak and feeble and dependent thing. In the nature of things it can never be self-sufficient. And our Lord became "poor" in that sense. He shared our human weakness and our human dependence. The self-sufficiency, the infinite power, which were His as

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God, He voluntarily laid aside. The consequence was that, all through His life, for strength and power Christ depended upon God. He said Himself more than once that of Himself He could do nothing, that the works He did were works which the Father had given Him to do. The consequence was He was instant in prayer. He constantly sought strength for His tasks in communion with His Father. He prayed before He preached; He prayed before He chose the Twelve; He prayed before He performed His miracles; He prayed before He faced the Cross. Jesus Himself was dependent upon prayer, and apart from these prayers, in which He laid hold of God, He could have accomplished nothing.

All this suggests many a profitable comment, as, for example, how near it brings Christ to us. He was verily touched with the feeling of all our infirmities, for He shared this sense of dependence with us. And how it suggests *our* need of prayer! For there were certain advantages that Jesus enjoyed as compared with you and me. He was a sinless man. He knew nothing of the weakness which is born of a sinful past. If He needed prayer and continually resorted to it, how much more do we! But I pass these reflections by without further comment, in order just to dwell for a moment on one point before I pass on.

It was in the power of prayer Christ performed His mighty works. The works which He did were

works which the Father had given Him to do. Or, as Godet pithily puts it, "Our Lord's miracles were just so many answered prayers." Every miracle an answered prayer! Does not that start questions in your mind? It starts this sort of question in mine, could not prayer effect miracles still? It was from God, by the avenue of prayer, Christ got His power. The avenue of prayer is open for us to tread, and God is no less rich in grace and power than He was when Jesus walked this earth. If we really came to God by the avenue of prayer, would not God's wonders be seen amongst us? Would not miracles still be the result of our answered prayers? That is the complaint we have to make about the Church to-day, isn't it? No mighty works are wrought by it. The Church is not a miracle-working Church. It does not compel the attention of a sceptical world by the wonders it achieves. I am not thinking now of wonders of the kind which Jesus worked. I am not thinking of miracles of physical healing, though even in that direction, perhaps, we have never realised what the prayer of faith may accomplish. I am thinking rather of those mightier miracles which are wrought in the moral realm: the opening of men's eyes to the beauty of holiness, the cleansing of men's hearts from the leprosy of sin, the quickening of dead souls into newness of life. These miracles do not happen to-day. At any rate, they happen only occasionally. They do not happen with such frequency as to

compel the attention and homage of the world. The Church somehow is an ineffective and impotent Church. But why? I suggest to you that here is *one* cause, perhaps the great cause, of our weakness. We have neglected the practice of prayer. Our eyes and our hearts are not lifted up to God. We do not continually wait upon Him. The reservoir of power in God is unchanged, it wastes not from one age to another. But we have allowed the channel to get blocked by disuse. I believe that still *the answer to prayer would be miracles*.

Indeed, have we not seen it in our own experience? Sometimes Churches set themselves to prepare for a series of special mission services. How do they prepare for them? By giving themselves to prayer, to prayer for the presence of God, to prayer for the outpouring of His Spirit, to prayer for souls. And the prayers get more urgent and intense and passionate as the time draws nigh. Men and women begin to plead and wrestle with God. And then, when the mission begins, the miracles happen. We are apt to put the wonder down to the eloquence of the imported missionary, or to the special methods he adopts. But, really, the miracles that happen find their true explanation in the prayers that were offered before he came. A Church in real touch with God is always a powerful Church. If we could keep up our practice of prayer, if this earnest waiting upon God were continuous, the wonders that occur at special seasons would occur

at *all* seasons. For miracles are always the result of answered prayers. And what I want to suggest to you is that miracles are still within our power if only we give ourselves to prayer. I do not think Christian people have any conception of the power that is really in their grasp in prayer. Prayer is communion with God. It is opening the life to the incoming of God. It is making room for the power of God. And to a people, to a Church, informed by the power of God, nothing is impossible. I am quite sure that by prayer—real, earnest, believing prayer—we could make the Church a mighty, victorious, irresistible Church, a Church able to open the eyes of the spiritually blind, and to impart new strength to the morally palsied, and to make the morally lame to run in the way of God's commandments, and to raise the spiritually dead, for miracles are always the result of answered prayers.

But now, leaving the general topic of our Lord praying, let me turn to the consideration of the words of this prayer which He offered up by Lazarus's graveside.

#### CHRIST'S THANKSGIVING

"Father," He said, "I thank Thee, that Thou heardest Me." You notice this prayer Christ offered was not a prayer of petition, but a prayer of thanksgiving. This is the outpouring of the gratitude of Christ's soul for a prayer already heard and answered. "Father, I thank Thee, that Thou heardest

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Me." The prayer, as Westcott says, had been made before. I wonder when? For there is no mention of any prayer previously offered by Jesus to which the raising of Lazarus was the answer. Probably, says Dr. McClymont, during those two days of waiting in Peræa. Westcott contents himself with referring to verse 4. I think the Bishop is right in thinking that verse gives us the clue. Before He uttered the words recorded in that verse, Jesus had lifted up His heart to God and received the assurance of His answer. When He heard of the sickness of Lazarus and the appeal of the sisters, that was what He did instinctively and immediately—He lifted up His heart to God. He prayed that, for the sake of the bereft sisters and for the sake of the world, to which the raising of Lazarus would act as a parable and a prophecy, the dead man might be restored to life. And swift upon the prayer came the assurance that God had answered it, that it was His will the great wonder should take place. It was in the assurance of that answer that Jesus turned to His disciples and the messenger who had come from the weeping sisters and said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby." And now He pours out His soul in glad thanksgiving to God for the mighty event that was soon to demonstrate that His prayer had been heard and answered. "Father, I thank Thee, that Thou hearest Me."



## CHRIST'S UNBROKEN FELLOWSHIP

But the hearing of this particular prayer was no strange or exceptional experience. "And I knew," He added, "that *Thou hearest Me always.*" The *I* is emphatic. "I on My part know," whatever might be the doubts and misgivings of others. I dare say there were many who, as they considered our Lord's outward life, wondered whether God listened to His prayers. I dare say His disciples often wondered. They knew Jesus was constantly engaged in prayer. They knew He used to steal away a long time before it was day in order to have a quiet time with God. But they saw the multitudes turn their backs on Him in Galilee, they saw the priests and rulers in fierce opposition to Him in Jerusalem, they saw Him the despised and rejected of men, and I am sure they must often have wondered whether God listened to the prayers of Jesus. And when at last they saw Him in the hands of His enemies, spat upon, insulted, beaten, bound, nailed upon the cross, laid in the grave, I am quite sure they felt that their Master's prayers had gone unanswered. They could not conceive that the Via Dolorosa of rejection and the Cross was the appointed way for the Messiah to tread, and they could not conceive of Jesus willingly accepting it and choosing it. Judging from merely outward circumstances, it looked very much as if God had clean forsaken Jesus. And yet in His Own soul

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our Lord had the blessed assurance that between Him and His Father there was perfect understanding, perfect harmony, perfect fellowship, that His prayers were all answered, that His Father and He always "willed one will." "I knew," He said, though His disciples might sometimes doubt it, though His enemies asserted He was in league with Satan, "I (for My part) knew that Thou hearest Me always."

What perfect understanding and absolute sympathy between Father and Son all this suggests! Our Lord's one aim in life was to do the Father's Will, to put Himself in line with the Father's purpose "Wist ye not," He said to His parents while He was still a lad, "that I must be about My Father's business?" "I came not to do Mine Own will," He said when He was grown up, "but the will of Him that sent Me." And He succeeded perfectly in doing that will. The rest of us, even though we sincerely desire to do God's Will, come short in one point and another. We do it only very imperfectly, with many a lapse and failure. But He gave an obedience that was absolutely flawless. "I do always the things," He said, "that please Him." There was perfect fellowship and sympathy between Father and Son, and that was why He was able to say, "I knew that Thou hearest Me always." The Father's heart and the Son's heart were in perfect accord. Place two pianos tuned to exactly the same pitch in a room, and if you strike a

note on the one, you will hear a response from the same note on the other. And the hearts of the Father and Son were in such complete and perfect tune that prayer from the One at once evoked response from the Other. They willed one will. So never a prayer of the Son went unanswered. "I knew that Thou hearest Me always."

And Bishop Westcott comments upon this, that we get help from it to the understanding of the true nature of prayer. It is not the setting up of the will of self, but the apprehension and taking to self of the Divine Will. It is not wanting *our* way, but wanting *God's* way, which always corresponds with the highest good of the individual. When we get into sympathy with God in this way, and learn to love what He loves and to desire what He desires, there will be no unanswered prayers. "If we ask anything according to His Will," says St. John in his first Epistle, "He heareth us."

And what a suggestion we get, in a sentence like this, of the strange forms in which answers to prayers may come. When the disciples saw their Lord despised and rejected, they were tempted to think that Christ's prayers had been neglected and refused. But Jesus knew differently. He knew that by rejection and sorrow, and the cruel cross, He was to achieve man's redemption and come to His throne. And so when men see sorrow and loss coming to God's people, they are tempted to think God has denied their prayers. But those who endure the

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sorrow and the loss know differently. When they prayed for purity and patience, and God sent pain, they knew God had made no mistake. For through pain the patience and the purity came. When they prayed for a closer walk with God, and God took away from them their dearest earthly companion, they knew God had not denied their petition. For to them in their loneliness He drew strangely and wonderfully near. "Thou hearest Me always." But the answers seem sometimes strange. "By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God of our salvation."

### CHRIST'S LAST APPEAL

Because God always heard Him, Christ lived in the atmosphere of a perpetual thanksgiving. His act of thanksgiving at Lazarus's grave is not to be construed as an outburst of gratitude extorted from Him by some exceptional condescension on God's part. Not at all! God was "hearing Him always," and He was therefore always giving Him thanks. This public expression of thanks, given with uplifted look and in audible voice in the presence of all these bystanders, was made really for the benefit of that multitude looking on. It was for their sake He said it, "that they may believe that Thou didst send Me." The invocation of the Father, the announcement that what was about to happen was the answer to prayer already offered, was meant to act as a sort of last appeal to the people, an ap-

peal to them to recognise that Jesus was the *sent of God*. "For," as Westcott says, "by thanking God for a work not yet seen He gave a crucial test of His fellowship with God." By addressing His Father, says Godet, "He had just put God into the position of either granting or withholding His co-operation." If Lazarus remained in the tomb after this solemn call upon God, let Jesus be acknowledged an impostor, and all His other miracles be attributed to Beelzebub! But if God, thus solemnly invoked, should make bare His arm, let Jesus be acknowledged as sent by Him. This act of thanks before the still occupied grave made this moment one of solemn ordeal, like that of Elijah on Carmel. By publicly thanking God before the miracle was performed, Christ put His Own claims to the most searching test; for He gave God the chance either to acknowledge Him or to repudiate Him. "The God that answereth Him by fire, let Him be God." If at the prayer of Jesus, Lazarus was restored to life, what escape was there from the conclusion that God was with Him and that God had sent Him? And that was Christ's hope that, as the result of this great deed, the Jews might believe that God, and no one else, had sent Him. For the "Thou" is emphatic like the "I" in the preceding sentence. It implies that some people attributed to Jesus a sending other than Divine; they said that He was the emissary of Beelzebub, they said that He was self-sent. His hope and prayer is that, as the re-

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sult of the prayer and the great deed that was to follow, "they may believe that *Thou* didst send *Me*."

How solicitous Jesus was for these Jews! How anxious that they should be brought to believe! What chances He gave them! How loth He was to give them up! And now came this last and most solemn appeal of all. He revealed His glory in His Lordship and authority over death in the hope that they might believe that God had sent Him. If in face of that stupendous wonder they persisted in disbelieving, they were left without excuse! That is Christ's hope and prayer for us as for the Jews. He prays that we may believe that He is the sent of God. And to warrant that belief He has done as mighty works in our midst as He did among the Jews of old. For still He raises into newness of life those who are dead in trespasses and sins. What can we say of the Person who accomplishes miracles of this sort save that He is come from God, that God is in Him? And if we refuse to say it, are we not left without excuse? How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

## XIV

### THE MIRACLE

"And when He had thus spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth."—JOHN xi. 43, 44.

AND now we come to the verses in which the Evangelist narrates the actual performance of the miracle. He tells it all in a couple of verses. He has taken forty verses to tell the circumstances that led up to it. He has devoted whole paragraphs to our Lord's conversation with the sisters, and to the description of His feelings and actions and words as He drew near the tomb. But the great and mighty deed itself is described in a couple of sentences. Nothing could be simpler, plainer, or more unadorned. If this were the time, I think I could construct a convincing argument for the truth of the miracle from the brevity and simplicity with which the story is told. This is not at all how a romancer would write. If this miracle had been the invention of some imaginative writer in the second century (as some critics assert), the temptation to dwell upon the wonder, to adorn and colour the narrative, would have been irresistible. The sober, simple, restrained prose of this narrative

is in itself evidence of its truth. There is no hint of the romancer or the imaginative writer about this account. Such a writer would have had much to say about the emotion of the sisters, about the astonishment of the crowd, about the feelings of Lazarus himself on being called back to earth. *This* account, while unsurpassed in vividness and solemnity, contents itself with recording Christ's summons and Lazarus's obedience. It is the severe simplicity of fact and truth.

"And when He had thus spoken"—that is, after He had spoken the words of the prayer we studied together in the previous sermon, in which He claimed that the act He was about to perform was done by God in answer to His prayer—"He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth." He "cried." It is a very strong word, and is nowhere else attributed to our Lord. His voice took upon itself the loud and commanding tones of authority. He cried "with a loud voice," a voice, Bishop Westcott comments, "of intelligible command," there being here, he thinks, a suggestion of a contrast between this clear, audible, intelligible command of Christ and the muttered incantations of the sorcerers. I am not at all sure, however, that there is any need to drag in the idea of the contrast with the mutterings of the sorcerers in order to account for the loud voice of Christ. I think it is quite enough to say that the loud voice was meant to signify our Lord's authority and command.



Lazarus had fallen on sleep, and the loud voice was to wake him out of sleep. It was, as Godet says, the expression of a decided will, sure of being obeyed. And obeyed it was, for he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes.

Now, although the account of the miracle is so brief (even curt) and so severely simple, there are great and mighty truths implied in it. I am going to mention two of them.

#### THE LIVING DEAD

"Lazarus, come forth," said Jesus. And the fact that He addressed such a summons to him implied that he still lived. "He that believeth in Me," Jesus had said to Martha, "though he die, yet shall he live." Though he die! In common with the rest of people, Martha had thought of death as something like the end! At any rate, she had thought of death as bringing some state of unconsciousness, very little to be distinguished from complete cessation of being, until the far-off resurrection-day should call the dead to life again. It was that notion of a long spell of suspended existence that Jesus wishes to correct. "Though he die," He said, "yet shall he live." Death did not mean the cessation of life, but only a change of life, a change of sphere. Those of whom we speak as dead go on living. "Though he die, yet shall he live." Death, according to Jesus, was an act, not a state; an

event, not a condition. Lazarus had "died," but though he had passed through the experience of death, he was still alive. And here our Lord acts on His great faith. He calls Lazarus, and Lazarus responds. It would have been no use calling to a dead man. A dead man could neither hear nor respond. But Jesus called to Lazarus, and Lazarus responded to the call, because, though he had passed through death, he himself was not dead at all, but alive. It is true Bethany was no longer his home. It is true he had disappeared from his old earthly haunts; but somewhere in the universe of God, and within reach of the voice of Jesus, Lazarus still lived.

And here we come across the first tremendous truth (a truth upon which I have dwelt before in my exposition of this chapter) which is suggested vividly and powerfully by the words of Christ's call, *the dead are not dead at all, but alive*. And their life is a *conscious and personal life*. "Lazarus, come forth," said Jesus. On the other side, as on this, he was the same Lazarus still. He lived on as Lazarus. I have no doubt he had left behind the weaknesses and hindrances incident to this mortal life. But he had not become another and a different being. Personality endured. "Lazarus," said Jesus, "come forth." And our dead are not dead at all, but alive, and they are essentially the same people yonder as they were here. Death removes limitations and banishes weaknesses and sins,

but it does not make those who pass through it into different persons. Intrinsically and essentially they remain the same. *They answer to the old names.*

I think there is nothing that bereaved hearts crave for more than to be sure of recognition. We get frightened sometimes lest death should have made such a change in our beloved as to make them quite unrecognisable. It is a needless and groundless fear. Heaven would not be heaven to us if we could not greet again our loved and lost and resume again (though in purified and exalted ways) the dear affections of this mortal life. But we need be in no distress or doubt upon this point. Lazarus was still Lazarus, and in the life on the other side of death. Isn't there a pretty little story told about the mother of the great Thomas à Becket! Whether the story is truth or mere legend (as the more sober historians insist) matters little or nothing to me just now. According to the story, she was a Saracen maiden who fell in love with à Becket's father when he was campaigning with the Crusaders in Palestine. And when the Crusaders left, she, drawn by her great love, which was more to her than country or kindred, followed them in due course westward and found her way to London. And all she knew of England was the name of her beloved. So through London the strange maiden went, crying out, "à Becket." And in due course the beloved answered to his name. And so when we "go west," as our lads say, and find ourselves in the strange

but beautiful land on the other side, when we whisper the old and familiar names, our dear ones will respond. For they remain yonder, as here, the same people. We shall meet and we shall know each other. They answer to the *old names!*

### THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST

And the second great truth which we may learn from the verses of my text is that of *the authority of Christ*. He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth," and he that was dead came forth. Lazarus was beyond the reach of the appeals and entreaties of his sisters, he was out of reach of all earth's sounds and voices; but, wherever he was, he was not beyond the reach of Christ's Will, and not beyond the summons of Christ's voice. Christ's commands run through the universe. He is the Lord of the unseen world as well as of this visible sphere. Do you remember what the Psalmist says about the sun? "There is nothing hid from the heat thereof." There is more than a little of the poet's licence about such a statement. For there are tracts of our earth that are never visited by the sun. But what the Psalmist asserts of the sun, so far as this world is concerned, is true of Jesus without limitation or reservation. There is no sphere outside His authority. He is Lord, not of this world only, but of *all* worlds. He is Lord of the unseen as well as of the seen. He is Lord of death as well as life. That is what He said of

Himself: "I am the First and the Last, and the Living One, and I became dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

"I have the keys." The keys are the symbols of authority. And Christ has the keys of death and of Hades. He has full authority over them. They have no power to detain a single soul. Death snatches this man and that man, and all men in turn. But it can keep none of them. Christ has the keys of death. It is not in Death's keeping, but in *Christ's* keeping, that our dear ones are. It is not Death who has the rule over them, but Christ. That is why they are not dead at all, but alive. We should be justified in speaking of them as dead, if the authority in the unseen were exercised by Death and Hades. But it is not. It is Christ Who has the keys. And He brings every soul out of the prison-house of death into full and abundant life. For it is not Lazarus only who hears the voice of Christ. "All that are in the tombs shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth." "All shall hear!" Our Lord's writ runs in the Great Hereafter. His Word is law. We sometimes shudder at the thought of death. Death in itself is such an ugly and brutal thing. And the region to which it admits us is strange, and we shrink from it just because it is strange. But we can comfort our hearts with the assurance that Christ rules there as here; indeed, He rules far more truly there than here. The

Hereafter is within Christ's authority. And that is enough to bring quietness to our hearts. "I have the keys of death and Hades." "Neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from the love of God."

"Lazarus," said our Lord with a loud voice, "come forth." And in token that He exercised authority even over death, the dead man came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes. There are some commentators who suggest that we get here a "wonder within a wonder"—that the dead man thus miraculously called to life was able miraculously to walk, though bound hand and foot with grave-clothes. But that is a needless multiplication of miracles. The probability is that, Egyptian fashion, every limb was separately swathed, so that the grave-clothes did not absolutely prohibit motion. Who can picture that swathed form stumbling from the tomb, bound hand and foot, and the unaccustomed eyes shrinking from the sunlight which had grown strange to them? asks Dr. MacLaren. And who can imagine the awe on the faces of the bystanders, as the helpers unwound the napkin from Lazarus's head? And who can picture the rapture of the sisters? But of all this the Evangelist says no word. He mentions one further short and peremptory command that fell from the lips of Christ. "Loose him," He said, "and let him go." It is another instance of our Lord's reserve in the use of power. He had done His part.

He alone could unloose the grip of death; but human hands could unbind the grave-clothes. "Loose him," He said, "and let him go." And there the story ends. No eye is allowed to see the joy of the sisters or to peer into the home that night.

There are many things we should like to have known about Lazarus. There are many questions we should like to have put to him, for he had passed through an experience the like of which had befallen no mortal man. We should especially like to have had his report of the land on the other side of death. For though, no doubt, God has some wise purpose to serve by keeping the nature of the future life so veiled, there is in the hearts of us all an eager craving to know more about it than we can gather from the scattered hints and suggestions we get in Scripture. That is why so many people in these days are trying to establish communication with the unseen. And Lazarus could have told us so much that we want to know. But not a word of his experience is recorded. Not a single word that he ever said about those four days he spent in the spiritual world has been preserved for us. You remember Tennyson's verses about Lazarus:

"Where wert thou, brother, those four days?  
There lives no record of reply  
Which, telling what it is to die,  
Had surely added praise to praise.

From every house the neighbours met,  
The streets were filled with joyful sound,

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A solemn gladness even crowned  
The purple brows of Olivet.

'Behold, a man raised up by Christ!'  
The rest remaineth unrevealed.  
He told it not, or something seal'd  
The lips of that Evangelist."

"He told it not." We must leave it there. It was not that he had nothing to tell, as Dr. Marcus Dods suggests. He had things too great for speech to tell. Perhaps, indeed, that was why he did not tell them. They were things which, because of their very glory, were unutterable. "He told it not." But I imagine this tremendous experience left its mark on Lazarus all his after life. He was the same Lazarus, and yet he was different. His experience had totally changed his outlook. From this time forth he measured all earthly things by eternal standards.

Browning, in that Epistle of an Arab physician, tries to imagine the change wrought in Lazarus by his brief sojourn in the spiritual realm. He pictures him as if living henceforth a sort of dazed life, as if his soul was elsewhere; as if his eye, dazzled with the glories beyond, could not adjust itself to the things of earth.

"Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,  
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven;  
The man is witless of the size, the sum,  
The value in proportion of all things,  
Or whether it be little or be much."



He is at cross-purposes with the world, though not hating it or despising it. The things the world counts big count for nothing with him, and the things the world counts nothing loom large before his eyes. He is conscious of some "vast, distracting orb of glory," which, conscious of, he must not enter yet, the spiritual life around the earthly life. His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here, so is the man "perplexed with impulses, sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on." So Browning describes Lazarus after having had his glimpse of the full light of the eternal world. And essentially I think Browning is right. Some such result as that his tremendous experience must have had upon him. He cared for nothing after that, as Browning says, save to please God. His affections were all set on things above, and all his treasure was in heaven.

And some such effect a real faith in resurrection and life ought to have upon every one of us. It was partly to create that faith that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. It was to make the sisters sure and His disciples sure, and through them, succeeding generations sure, that beyond this temporal world there was an eternal and spiritual world in which men continued to live. There is a sense in which the resurrection of Lazarus is more comforting and reassuring even than the resurrection of Jesus. A person might object that Christ came to life again, that death had no dominion over Him,

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just *because He was Christ*, just because He was not an ordinary man, but the Everlasting Son of the Father. Paul, it is true, treats Christ's resurrection as the typical experience; not as an isolated fact, but as the culminating illustration of the fact that is to happen to us all. "He is the first fruits of them that sleep!" And yet plain men, in spite of all Paul's reasoning, might remain doubtful. They might say that Christ's resurrection was an exceptional experience of an exceptional man. But Lazarus was just a plain, ordinary, everyday man. The fact that Jesus brought him back to earth lifts a whole load of doubt and fear from the soul. It shows that resurrection is the normal experience. The fact that He called Lazarus shows that Lazarus was there to be called. It makes the life beyond absolutely real. "If Christ raised Lazarus," as Dr. Dods puts it, "He has a power to which we can safely trust, and life is a thing of permanence and joy."

But if we believe in resurrection and life, that again ought to have enormous influence upon character and conduct. I have ventured to believe that Lazarus was a different man after his resurrection, that he moved about among the men of his day almost like a stranger, amongst them but not of them, wondering at them and wondered at by them. And a real belief in the Resurrection and the Life, in the reality of the life after death, ought to make a vast difference to us. I have up to now dwelt mainly on

the comfort and good hope it ought to give us in face of the passing of our own dear ones. But there is much more than comfort in this faith. There is a revolutionary power in it. It ought to change and transfigure life from end to end. It ought to alter our standards, it ought to give us new ideals and ambitions, it ought to give us new interests. Men who believe in this world, and this world only, may live for money and pleasure and power and fame; but for the men and women who believe in the eternal world, the spiritual world which is filled with the Presence of God, these things ought not to count. The only things that ought to count are the things that are above where Christ sits. But do we know the power of our resurrection in that way? Are we really living for the things that count in the eternal world? Or while professing to believe in two worlds, do we live as if there were only one? To deliver life from worldliness, to make it a great and dignified and noble thing, what we want is a deeper faith in the Resurrection and the Life.

I have one more word to add as I bring this exposition to a close. In the ancient Church this great miracle was treated, not simply as fact, but also as allegory and parable. As Christ raises those who are naturally dead, so He quickens them also who are dead in trespasses and sins. And this particular miracle was used as an illustration of the infinite reach of Christ's quickening power. There are three resurrection miracles recorded in the history of

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Jesus. And there are degrees in the wonderfulness of them. The first of these miracles was that of the raising of Jairus's daughter. The breath had scarcely left the body. The little maid had scarcely closed her eyes in death before Jesus' voice cried, "Little maid, arise." The second was that of the widow's son at Nain. He had been dead for hours, and was being taken out to burial. But the most wonderful of all was that of Lazarus, who had been in the grave four days and who had begun to see corruption. The miracles stand in an ascending scale. He raised Jairus's daughter *from the bed*; He raised the widow's son *from the bier*; He raised Lazarus *from the grave*. And the old fathers used all this to illustrate the extent of Christ's saving power. He can raise not simply those who have just fallen away from truth and holiness, like the damsel who had just expired; He can save not only those who have been some time dead in sins, like the young man on his way to burial, but He can save the man who, like Lazarus, has been a long time dead, who is festering in his sins and shut up in them as in a tomb. There is no limit to the saving power of Christ. He can save to the very uttermost. What a Christ is our Christ! He can burst the bonds both of death and sin.

## XV

### THE EFFECT OF THE MIRACLE

"Many therefore of the Jews, which came to Mary and beheld that which He did, believed on Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done."—JOHN xi. 45.

FROM the account of the miracle the Evangelist proceeds directly to speak of its effect upon the people. That is not what a romancer would have done. A romancer would have followed Lazarus to his home, and tried to picture for us something of the joy, the wonder, the rapture, which filled the hearts of the sisters for this crowning mercy. And he would have given us some of Lazarus's talk, and he would have made Lazarus talk about his experiences in that spiritual world into which he had been launched, and from which by the voice of Christ he had been recalled. Romancers, indeed, did that in the Middle Ages. They made Lazarus speak of what he heard and saw in the world beyond the grave, and by the lips of Lazarus give their own conception of what that world is like. But this chapter is not romance, this is plain and simple history. We should very much like to have known

some of the things that happened, some of the things that were said in the Bethany home that night; but John has nothing to say about them, for the very good reason, probably, that he was not there to hear them. We may feel disappointed, but at any rate it gives us the comforting assurance that we are dealing, not with an imaginative writer, but with one who sticks closely just to strict and literal fact.

There is an immediate and there is a more remote effect which John proceeds to describe for us in the next couple of paragraphs. In verses 45 and 46 he describes the effect of the miracle upon the actual spectators. In verses 47 to 53 he describes its effect upon the priests and the Pharisees when it was reported to them. His object is to show how this great miracle was a link in the chain of events which issued according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, in the atoning death of the Son of God upon the cross.

### THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT

First of all, let us look at the two verses which speak of the immediate effect upon the bystanders and beholders. The verses seem quite simple and plain, but really they are not easily interpreted. At any rate, a merely cursory reading might bring us to quite the wrong conclusion. Take that verse 45 to begin with, and I hope you won't think the point I am going to make so pedantic as to be unworthy of notice. If you will compare the Authorised Ver-

sion with the Revised Version, you will notice that there has been a change made in the position of a comma. The Authorised Version reads, "Many of the Jews which came to Mary," and places the comma there. The Revised Version reads, "Many therefore of the Jews," and places the comma there. Now, you must not think that the position of a comma is so trifling a matter that it can really make no difference. It makes quite a serious difference. The Authorised Version reading which says, "Many of the Jews which came to Mary," implies that, while "many" of Mary's friends and sympathisers believed, some of them did not, but went away to the Pharisees and told them what had happened. That is to say, the contrasted effect which John describes in these two verses is the contrasted effect produced upon the company of those friends of the sisters who had come from Jerusalem to sympathise with them. The Revised Version seeks to be more true to the Greek original by shifting the comma. I wish the revisers had gone further, and inserted the words "even those" before the "which came," in order to make the matter perfectly clear. For in the Greek the participles which are translated "which came to Mary and beheld" are in apposition not to the Jews, but to the "many" with which the verse begins. The Jews present were not confined to the friends of the sisters. There were others there who had been led, out of curiosity, to follow when they saw the little procession on its way to the grave,

especially when it was discovered that in the midst of the procession was Jesus. Now, out of this crowd of Jews many believed, and the many who believed were those friends of the Bethany household who had come from Jerusalem to sympathise with them. I don't know whether I have made it quite clear. This is how I would translate the verse, or, rather, I will let Dr. Weymouth translate it for me, because he reproduces exactly the meaning of the Greek: "Therefore a considerable number of the Jews—namely, those who had come to Mary and had witnessed His deeds—became believers in Him." The point to notice is that *all* these people, who had come to weep with Mary, gave in their allegiance to Jesus.

Now, passing on to the next verse, we are faced with another small but real difficulty. "But some of them," says the Evangelist, "went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done." Now, what exactly does the Evangelist mean? Does he mean us to understand that some of these friends of Mary's who believed went off and told the Pharisees? Grammatically such a construction is possible, and certain commentators adopt it. And they meet the objection, which naturally occurs to any reader, "Why should these people who had just come to believe in Jesus rush off to tell the Pharisees?" by saying that they did it with a good object. They thought that now they had news to tell about Jesus which would convince



even the Pharisees, that He was God's Messiah, and which must win them to His allegiance.

Now, one would rather like to hold that view. One instinctively leans to the kindlier interpretation. Even Westcott says: "It is not possible to determine their motive. It may have been simple perplexity." It is true that, so far as the *ipsissima verba* of the verse is concerned, the Bishop is quite right. But a general view of John's manner and method, and the obvious antitheses between verses 45 and 46, are both against this more charitable interpretation. If I may quote Archbishop Trench's words, "St. John does here what he does evermore, he divides light from the darkness, the belief from the unbelief, and marks the progressive growth both of the one and of the other." That, you may say, is the purpose of the Gospel, to trace the growth of faith and unfaith and show how, as faith grew more convinced, unfaith became more aggressive and menacing. Again and again we have noticed how John has pointed out this double effect of almost every episode of our Lord's life. He has pointed it out, for instance, in connexion with the last miracle recorded—the miracle, indeed, which necessitated our Lord's flight from Jerusalem. Some of the people said that He had a devil and was mad. Others said, "Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?"

It is therefore exactly in John's manner, exactly what we might expect, to find him setting down the

contrasting effects of this greatest miracle upon the different sets of people. It brought some to settled faith, it confirmed others in their opposition and hate. Some knelt at His feet and called Him Lord; others went and "informed" to His bitter and deadly foes. That is, I am quite sure, the contrast of these verses. But in that case, what are we to understand by the "some of them"? I answer, some of the Jews, but not some of those Jews who came to comfort Mary. I said a moment ago that there were more in the crowd of bystanders than simply the sympathisers with the sisters. Others had gathered round out of curiosity. John includes the total crowd under the title "Jews." What happened was this, "Many of the Jews"—namely, all those who came to Mary—believed. But some of them—those other people who had gathered out of curiosity, and who were Jews in spirit as well as in blood—went away and told the Pharisees the things which Jesus had done. I hope the minuteness of this exposition has not been wearisome, but I did not see how, without saying this much, I could make clear what it was that John exactly meant us to understand. Now let us look for a moment, not at the form, but at the contents, of this statement.

I will not dwell upon the fact that Jesus was always a principle of division. He was that from the very beginning. Simeon told Mary that her child was set for the rise and fall of many in Israel. For the rise of some and for the fall of others.

And so, verily, it came to pass. From the day of His first appearance He began to divide people. Some He drew by irresistible cords of love, and some He repelled. Some believed on Him, and some wholly rejected Him. Some left all and followed Him, and some went about seeking to kill Him. Some worshipped Him as God, and some blasphemed Him as a devil. By His mere presence He sundered men into two companies—some were for Him, some against Him. The words He spoke, the deeds He did, split people up into opposite groups. He came not to send peace on earth, but a sword. If there were five in a house, the result of His coming was to divide them, three against two, or two against three; father against son, son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

And so it is still, *Christ divides*. He divides every company, every household, every congregation. We cannot help being either for Him or against Him. To the last He divides, for that is the picture of the Judgment we get, some going to the right and some to the left, according as they do or do not love Him. And there is nothing arbitrary or capricious or immoral about all this. Christ is the real Touchstone of human character. It is when we are in His presence that we reveal on which side in our heart of hearts we really are. All who really love goodness and truth, love Him. All who love self and sin, hate

Him. He draws the good as the sun draws the flowers, but the people who have evil hearts shun Him as unclean beasts do the light. That is why a man's attitude towards Christ becomes the most searching of moral tests, and that by that attitude his destiny is settled. For by his attitude towards Christ it may always be known whether fundamentally and essentially a man is good or bad. But leaving this truth that Christ is always a principle of division, and brings faith or unfaith to the surface, let me call your attention to the double effect produced on the spectators.

#### BELIEF

Many of them—namely, those who came to Mary and beheld that which He did—believed on Him. These friends of Mary's may have been in some measure favourably disposed towards Jesus. They knew how the Bethany people loved Him, and even the hostility of the rulers in Jerusalem could not make them dismiss as a devil this Person whom their friends knew so intimately and whom they regarded as the Messenger of God, and what they saw on this never-to-be-forgotten day scattered all their hesitation and converted doubt into faith. I have no doubt they had been impressed by our Lord's tender sympathy with the sisters. "See how He loved him," was their comment as they saw Him weep. But the stupendous deed by which our Lord showed His mastery over death, and revealed Him-

self as the Lord and Giver of Life, was that which changed admiration into triumphant faith. When they beheld "that which He did," that crowning work, and when they saw the dead man come forth, they believed on Him. They believed on Him as the Messenger of God. I do not wish to suggest that they believed that He was the Son of God in the metaphysical sense as you and I do. I do not wish to suggest that they would at this time have understood what we mean by "salvation by faith." Their ideas of the Messiah's mission were like those of the disciples themselves, vague, and tinged with the material and earthly. It took time to reveal to them what the true nature of Christ's work was. But this was the critical moment in their lives. They "believed in Him." They cast their vote for Christ. They accepted Him as God's Representative and Messenger to them. From this time forth they were on His side and gave Him their allegiance. For who but the "Sent of God" could have done what He did.

It was not our lot to be spectators of this mighty and stupendous deed, but I have not the smallest doubt the wonder happened. This is not allegory or parable, but sober fact. Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth," and he that was dead (and had been dead for four days) came forth. Well, what attitude are we going to take towards the Jesus who performed this mighty deed? What are we going to say about Him? Who could He be

but God manifest in the flesh? And being so, what can we do but "believe in Him"? And what do I mean by "believing in Him"? I mean venturing upon Him, risking everything on Him, staking life and eternity on Him. I mean *believing that He is God*, believing that God is what Jesus represents Him to be.

Some one has said that, apart from Jesus, we have really no right for believing that God is Love. Nature does not teach it. Nature is "red in tooth and claw with ravin." And Providence does not seem to teach it. Oh, yes, you and I, in the light of what Christ has said, believe that there is love in it. But the love is not obvious. The love in all the suffering of the present moment is not obvious. Leave Jesus out, and we have no assurance whatsoever that God is Love. But "believing in Jesus" means believing in spite of all appearances, in spite of all challenging facts, in spite of all sufferings and tragedies, that God is Love, that God is a redeeming, saving, healing God. I know it means making a venture, but surely the deeds that Christ did, warrant us in making the venture. Who could be Lord of Death and Giver of Life save One in whom God really dwelt! And if God was in Christ, if Christ was in very truth God, what does that mean but that He is a God of infinite compassion and love? It is to that conclusion the consideration of Lazarus's story brings the Arab physician in Browning's poem. He is ashamed almost, as a scientific

man, to treat Lazarus's story as serious at all. But he returns to it in spite of himself. It is the conclusion as to the nature of God that draws him. If the story be true, what tremendous conclusions follow.

"The very God! think, Abib, dost thou think?  
 So the All-Great is the All-Loving too;  
 So through the thunder comes a human voice  
 Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here,  
 Face My hands fashioned, see it in Myself,  
 Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of Mine,  
 But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,  
 And thou must love Me Who have died for thee.'"

That is what believing in Christ means, risking everything on the fact that the love and saving purpose we see in Him are just the love and saving purpose of God Himself. It means facing a world of contradiction and troubles, facing this world of infinite sorrow and pain, and saying,

"Thou, God, art Love; I build my faith on that."

And it means believing that Christ is Lord of death as well as life, and that on the other side of death, as on this, we are in His care and keeping. It means believing in life which is triumphant over death because of what Christ has said and because of what Christ has done. Look at the Christ revealed in this passage! His voice can reach the land that lies on the other side of the grave, and those who reside in it hear it and obey it. If we had nothing else to go by but the revelation given

us in this mighty deed, two things are made sure—one that the dead are not dead, but alive; and the other, that they are still in the care and keeping and under the rule of Christ, and that He still knows them all by name. "To believe in Him" is to believe all this is true, to face death with these two great assurances as veritable anchors of the soul. But do we *believe in Christ*? Are we content to trust Him? To leave our dear dead to Him? We need comfort and good hope in these days when we can all hear the rustling of the wings of the angel Death. There are thousands of homes in England which have lain, during these last five years, under the shadow of a deep and unspeakable anxiety. Parents knew their lads were somewhere in that fifty-mile front in France, on the whole of which Death was reaping a terrible harvest. And they wondered, with a clutch at the heart, what the casualty lists might tell. There is but one thing that will bring effectual comfort in face of anxieties and fears such as those, and that is to *believe in Christ*, humbly and simply to accept His revelation; to take to our hearts the double truth this story teaches, that our dead are alive, that they are in the keeping of Christ, and that He calleth them each by name. We can face the very worst in the strength of that faith. There is joy and peace in believing. To that quiet, restful faith in life which death cannot touch, in a life which yonder, as here, is in the keeping of Christ, may our study of this marvellous



deed help to bring us all. When we remember what He did, may we too believe on Him.

### UNBELIEF

But not all believed! Not all were moved to faith! There were some who witnessed the deed, and who were moved thereby only to deeper and more deadly hate. "But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things which Jesus had done." They went and laid an information against Him in order to stir to even greater activity the hostility of the Pharisees. I don't know how they accounted for the mighty deed. I suppose they must have tried to persuade themselves that the whole thing was an imposture, and that Jesus was a mere juggler and trickster. Our Lord Himself said once about certain people that "they would not believe though one rise from the dead." No miracle, however mighty, will convince people of stubborn, prejudiced, and unbelieving hearts. Faith is never a matter of ocular or logical demonstration. There is no escape from the conclusion that two and two make four, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, and so on. But a man can always refuse to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, if he is so minded. The evidence may to you and me seem conclusive, but there is no evidence a prejudiced man cannot explain away. The fact is there is always an element of will, of venture, in all faith. A man must take a

risk and cast his vote. But some may refuse to believe. They may give their vote, not for, but against. They may close their eyes to the evidence and say, "We will not have this Man to reign over us." That is what these Jews did. In face of this stupendous deed, they refused to believe. They went away and told the Pharisees. This deed of saving love but inflamed their hatred. It is an illustration of the deadly effects of prejudice. It made them call good evil, and light darkness, and the mighty power of God the work of Satan. Instead of worshipping Christ for His great deed of love, it sent them away to compass His death. It is a lurid illustration of the crimes into which men may be driven by the evil heart of unbelief.

Some believed on Him and would have made Him King, and *did* make Him King in their hearts that very day. And others went away and began to plot His death. Some gave Him a throne; and others prepared for Him a cross. And one or other of these two things, either a throne or a cross, all those who come in contact with Him prepare for Him still.



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